

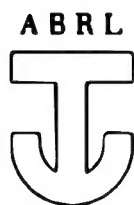
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AN INTRODUCTION  
TO  
THE NEW TESTAMENT

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BY  
Raymond E. Brown, S.S.



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# THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Since Luke-Acts constitutes one book in two volumes, the subsections on *Purpose* and *Date of writing* in the previous chapter apply to Acts as well. After the *General Analysis*, subdivisions will be devoted to these special issues: *Sources and compositional features*, “*Luke*” the historian, *Authorship*, *Issues for reflection*, and *Bibliography*.

## General Analysis of the Message

The author gave no title to this book any more than he gave a title to the Gospel; but later church writers dubbed it “Acts” (in the sense of deeds), thus implicitly comparing it to Hellenistic writings of the same name describing the career and accomplishments of famous men. The modifier “of the Apostles”<sup>1</sup> is not precise, for there are only two major figures: Peter (who is one of the Twelve Apostles, and appears at first with John) is prominent in nine or ten chaps., and Paul (who is only twice called an apostle, and appears at first with Barnabas) is prominent in seventeen chaps. Occasionally, therefore, scholars prefer the designation: Acts of Peter and Paul. In what follows proportionately more discussion will be devoted to the pre-Pauline beginnings, because nowhere else in the NT are they reported in any detail. In this material attention will be given to the continuity of Acts with the portrayal of Jesus in Luke. As for the Pauline section of Acts, in addition to the treatment here, Chapter 16 below surveys Paul’s life,<sup>2</sup> and Chapter 17 offers an appreciation of Paul.

## INTRODUCTION: PREPARING JESUS’ FOLLOWERS FOR THE SPIRIT (1:1–26)

**1. Jesus Instructs His Disciples and Ascends to Heaven (1:1–11).** At the beginning in 1:1–2, a *type of subprologue* (cf. Luke 1:1–4), the author

<sup>1</sup>In twenty-eight chapters there are occasional references to apostles (e.g., 1:2; 4:36–37; 5:12; 8:1), who consistently are the Twelve (cf. 6:2,6), with the exception of Paul and Barnabas in 14:4,14. The only figure who gets lengthy treatment in Acts besides Peter and Paul (and Barnabas as Paul’s companion) is Stephen, who is not designated an apostle.

<sup>2</sup>Table 5 in that Chapter compares data from Acts with data from the Pauline letters; Table 6 sketches Pauline chronology.

Summary of Basic Information

DATE, AUTHOR, LOCALE: Same as for Luke (p. 226 above).

INTEGRITY: Western Greek mss. have a significant number of passages (many of them with additional information) missing from other mss.

DIVISION:

1:1–2            **Introduction: Preparing Jesus’ Followers for the Spirit**

- 1. Jesus instructs his disciples and ascends to heaven (1:1–11)
- 2. Awaiting the Spirit; replacement of Judas (1:12–26)

2:1–8:1a       **Mission in Jerusalem**

- 1. The Pentecost scene; Peter’s sermon (2:1–36)
- 2. Reception of the message; Jerusalem communal life (2:37–45)
- 3. Activity, preaching, and trials of the apostles (3:1–5:42)
- 4. The Hellenists; toleration; Stephen’s trial and martyrdom (6:1–8:1a)

8:1b–12:25   **Missions in Samaria and Judea**

- 1. Dispersal from Jerusalem; Philip and Peter in Samaria (8:1b–25)
- 2. Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch en route to Gaza (8:26–40)
- 3. Saul en route to Damascus; return to Jerusalem and Tarsus (9:1–31)
- 4. Peter at Lydda, Joppa, Caesarea, and back to Jerusalem (9:32–11:18)
- 5. Antioch; Jerusalem; Herod’s persecution; Peter’s departure (11:19–12:25)

13:1–15:35   **Mission of Barnabas and Saul Converting Gentiles; Approval at Jerusalem**

- 1. Antioch church sends Barnabas and Saul: Mission to Cyprus and SE Asia Minor (13:1–14:28)
- 2. Jerusalem conference and approval; return to Antioch (15:1–35)

15:36–28:31 **Mission of Paul to the Ends of the Earth**

- 1. From Antioch through Asia Minor to Greece and return (15:36–18:22)
- 2. From Antioch to Ephesus and Greece, and return to Caesarea (18:23–21:14)
- 3. Arrest in Jerusalem; imprisonment and trials in Caesarea (21:15–26:32)
- 4. Journey to Rome as a prisoner (27:1–28:14a)
- 5. Paul at Rome (28:14b–31).

takes pains to relate his second volume to his first. Not only does he mention once more Theophilus to whom the Gospel was dedicated (Luke 1:3); but he sums up the import of the Gospel: “In the first book I have narrated all that Jesus began to do and teach *until the day he was taken up*, after he had given instruction through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.” In this new book what Jesus began is continued through the same Spirit working in the apostles. The italicized clause prepares us for a seeming duplication: Luke 24:50–51 recounted the ascension or taking up of Jesus to

heaven on Easter Sunday night from Bethany (on the Mount of Olives), but Acts 1:9–12 will recount an ascension of Jesus to heaven at least forty days later from the Mount of Olives.<sup>3</sup> In his storyline the author is using the single resurrection-ascension complex as a hinge. From God's viewpoint the ascension of the risen Jesus after death is timeless, but there is a sequence from the viewpoint of those whose lives it touched. For the Gospel the ascension visibly terminates the activity of Jesus on earth; for Acts it will prepare the apostles to be witnesses to him to the ends of the earth.

*The risen Jesus appears to his disciples for forty days after his passion (1:3–7)* as a preparation for the coming of the Spirit. Early tradition speaks of plural appearances of Jesus,<sup>4</sup> but architectonically Acts has fitted them into forty days to match the forty days in Luke 4:1–2, 14 that Jesus spent in the desert before he went in the power of the Spirit to begin his ministry in Galilee. In both instances the author is evoking the forty years in the desert during which God prepared Israel for entry into the Promised Land. (For the correlation of forty days and forty years, see Num 14:34; Ezek 4:6.) Here the preparatory period allows Jesus to give proofs of the resurrection (Acts 1:3; cf. the apologetic tone in Luke 24:36–43) and to present clearly his notion of the kingdom. The apostles are to wait in Jerusalem for baptism with the Holy Spirit as promised by JBap (Luke 3:16). Most important, in relation to the full coming of the kingdom Jesus tells them, “It is not for you to know the times or seasons.”<sup>5</sup> Countering many speculations about the endtime, this firm answer was essential for the composition of Acts in the 80s: If the end were coming immediately, it would not be sensible to write a book for future readers or to envision a mission that would reach the whole world.

*The outline of this second volume is supplied in Acts 1:8* through a directive of Jesus to the apostles: “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”<sup>6</sup> The Acts story that begins in Jerusalem will end in Rome (chap. 28), the center of an empire extending to the known ends of earth. Having thus prepared his disciples for the future, *Jesus is taken up to heaven (1:9–11)*. Two men in white suddenly are stand-

<sup>3</sup>M. C. Parsons, *The Departure of Jesus in Luke-Acts: The Ascension Narratives in Context* (JSNTSup 21; Sheffield: JSOT, 1987).

<sup>4</sup>E.g., I Cor 15:5–8, but presumably over a much longer time since Paul is included.

<sup>5</sup>Acts 1:7 is a Lucan variation of Mark 13:32: “Of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” Acts omits the lack of knowledge of the Son, since it is now the risen Lord who speaks.

<sup>6</sup>Acts presents these as the risen Jesus' words; but that must be understood correctly, for the book goes on to show that the disciples had no awareness of having been informed of such a plan. Writing some fifty years after the early evangelizing, the author looks back on the geographical expansion that had taken place and understands it as what Christ willed for his church, whence the attribution to the risen Jesus, who had prophesied it.

ing there to interpret the event for Jesus' followers, even as two (angelic) men in dazzling apparel were standing by the empty tomb as interpreters for the women (Luke 24:4–7). Since the ascension takes place from the Mount of Olives, where God will come in the final judgment and manifest kingship over all the earth (Zech 14:4–21), the two can predict that Jesus will come back in the same way as he has been seen going.

**2. Awaiting the Spirit; Replacement of Judas (1:12–26).** *Those who await the promised coming of the Spirit are listed and numbered in 1:12–15.* Praying together in Jerusalem in the upper room are the Eleven (apostles minus Judas), the women, Mary the mother of Jesus (chronologically the last NT reference to her), and his brothers. This listing too represents continuity with the Gospel. The apostles could bear witness to the public ministry and the risen Jesus; the women, to the burial and empty tomb (Luke 23:55–24:10); Mary, to events of Jesus' birth and youth (Luke 1–2). An estimate in 1:15 puts the number of believers at about 120 and reflects the author's penchant for numbers and symbolism. He next recounts how the apostolic number left vacant by Judas was filled out to complete the Twelve (120 = 10 believers for each of the 12?).

Peter takes the initiative in this completion by telling *how Judas lost his share in the apostolic ministry (Acts 1:16–20)*. The account of Judas' suicide in Matt 27:3–10 is quite different (p. 201 above; BDM 2.1404–10). From what the two stories have in common we may suspect that Judas died quickly and violently and that the early Christians called upon the death of wicked OT figures to explain God's punishment of the man who had handed Jesus over.<sup>7</sup>

The place of Judas is filled by *the selection of Matthias (Acts 1:21–26)*. That italicized description does not do justice to the key element. Matthias has no personal import and will never again be mentioned; what is essential is that the number of the Twelve be complete. Israel of old had twelve patriarchs representing the twelve tribes; in the course of time Levi lost a regular share in the Promised Land (even though it had cities), and the sons of Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh) were counted so that the pattern of twelve might be preserved. The story of the Israel renewed in Jesus can start with no fewer than Twelve. They are not to be an ongoing institution in the church of subsequent centuries, but are a once-for-all symbol for the whole of the renewed Israel, never to be replaced when they die (see Acts 12:2 below). Judas deserted and did not go to one of the twelve heavenly thrones for judging Israel to which the others will go, as promised by Jesus (Luke 22:30;

<sup>7</sup>As we saw, Matt shows parallelism with the death of Ahithophel, echoing II Sam, Deut, Jer, Zech. Acts shows parallelism with the death of the antiGod figure Antiochus IV Epiphanes (II Macc 9:7–12), echoing Wisdom 4:19; Ps 69:26; 109:8.



Matt 19:28).<sup>8</sup> Just as the Twelve were originally chosen by Jesus (John 15:16), by means of lots, the choice of Judas' replacement is left to God's will. The community is now prepared for the coming of the Spirit.

## MISSION IN JERUSALEM (2:1–8:1a)

**1. The Pentecost Scene; Peter's Sermon (2:1–36).** The Feast of Weeks or Pentecost (so called because it was celebrated seven weeks or fifty days after Passover) was a pilgrimage feast when pious Jews came from their homes to the Temple or central shrine in Jerusalem. The plausible historical nucleus of *the coming of the Spirit described in Acts 2:1–13* is that on the next pilgrimage feast after Jesus' death and resurrection his Galilean disciples and his family came to Jerusalem and that, while they were there, the presence of the Spirit<sup>9</sup> was charismatically manifested as they began to speak in tongues. This was seen as a sign that they should proclaim publicly what God had done in Jesus.

Acts has re-presented that nucleus with theological insight, highlighting its central place in the Christian history of salvation. In the re-presentation the meaning of Pentecost plays a key role. An agricultural feast of thanksgiving celebrated in May or June, like the other Jewish feasts it had acquired additional meaning by recalling what God had done for the chosen people in "salvation-history." The deliverance from Egypt in the middle of the first month (Exod 12) was commemorated at Passover. In the third month (19:1), and thus about a month and a half later, the Israelites arrived at Sinai; and so Pentecost, occurring at roughly the same interval after Passover, became the commemoration of God's giving the covenant to Israel at Sinai—the moment when Israel was called to be God's own people.<sup>10</sup>

In depicting God's appearance at Sinai, Exod 19 includes thunder and smoke; and the Jewish writer Philo (contemporary with the NT) describes angels taking what God said to Moses on the mountaintop and carrying it out on tongues to the people on the plain below. Acts, with its description of

<sup>8</sup>We may think of these men as "wearing two hats": They were the Twelve and they were also apostles (see the distinction in I Cor 15:5–7). *The Twelve* were irreplaceable eschatological figures, not part of church administrative structure. *The apostles* (a wider group inclusive of the Twelve) founded and nurtured communities, and "bishops" (figures in church structure) succeeded the apostles in the care of those churches.

<sup>9</sup>The Spirit plays an enormous role in Acts; see J.H.E. Hull, *The Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles* (London: Lutterworth, 1967); J.D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience . . . in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975); R. P. Menzies, *The Development of Early Christian Pneumatology, with Special Reference to Luke-Acts* (JSNTSup 54; Sheffield: JSOT, 1991).

<sup>10</sup>In the OT no salvation-history meaning is supplied for Weeks (Pentecost), but in later rabbinical writings the meaning given above is attested. Thanks to *Jubilees* and the DSS, we now have evidence that this meaning was known in Jesus' time.

the sound of a mighty wind and tongues as of fire, echoes that imagery, and thus presents the Pentecost in Jerusalem as the renewal of God's covenant, once more calling a people to be God's own. According to Exodus, in the Sinai covenant the people who heard the invitation to be God's own and accepted it were Israelites. After Sinai in biblical language the other nations remained "no people."<sup>11</sup> Acts 2:9–11, with its broad sweep from the eastern extremities of the Roman Empire (Parthians, Medes, and Elamites) to Rome itself, describes the nationalities who at Pentecost observed and heard what was effected by the Spirit at the Jerusalem renewal of the covenant. Thus Acts anticipates the broad reach of the evangelizing, now begun, that will ultimately make even the Gentiles God's own people (Acts 28:28).<sup>12</sup> Implicitly this Pentecost is more momentous and wider-reaching than the first Pentecost at Sinai.

Reaction to the Spirit-filled disciples speaking in tongues—ecstatic behavior that looked to observers like drunkenness—causes Peter to deliver *the first sermon* (2:14–36), a sermon that Acts conceives of as the fundamental presentation of the gospel.<sup>13</sup> Peter interprets the action of the Spirit at Pentecost as the fulfillment of the signs of the last days foretold by the prophet Joel—an interpretation that matches the strong stress placed by Acts on prophecy.

Worth noting is the fact that Peter begins this proclamation in what we would call OT terms, by quoting a prophecy. This opening affirms the basic consistency of what God has done in Jesus Christ with what the God of Israel did for and promised to the people of the covenant. Then Peter turns to tell what God has done in Jesus: a brief summary of his mighty works, crucifixion and resurrection, culminating in scriptural evidence that he was the Lord and Messiah (2:36). In a certain sense this concentration on christology represents a change from Jesus' own style as narrated in Luke's

<sup>11</sup>By implication in Deut 32:21; "no people" is a category to which a disobedient Israel is symbolically reduced in Hos 1:9; see I Pet 2:10.

<sup>12</sup>A possibility is that the list in 2:9–11 describes the areas evangelized by missionaries from the Jerusalem church (e.g., the East and Rome), as distinct from areas evangelized from other centers like Antioch (e.g., through the journeys of Paul). In Acts 2:5 Luke describes the people from these areas as devout Jews, an identification that fits the pilgrimage feast context. Yet we may be meant to see here an anticipation that all from these nations (2:17: "all flesh") would be evangelized. For traditions underlying 2:1–13 see A.J.M. Wedderburn, *JSNT* 55 (1994), 27–54.

<sup>13</sup>In the subsections below on *Sources* and "*Luke*" *the historian* the question of historicity will be raised. Did Peter actually deliver a sermon on Pentecost itself? What did he say? The sermon in Acts is composed by the author of the book, but did he have a tradition about the nucleus of the apostolic preaching? The speaking in tongues should make us cautious in judging. At an early level of recounting, the speaking was ecstatic, whence the appearance of drunken babbling. It has been reinterpreted in Acts as speaking in other tongues or languages that are understandable—a reinterpretation that has not wiped out the earlier tradition.

Gospel. There, although both an angel and God testified to Jesus as Messiah and divine Son, and the disciples called him Lord, Jesus did not talk directly about himself. He spoke about God's kingdom and its challenge to accepted values. Yet Acts confirms the evidence of Paul that early preachers shifted the primary focus of their proclamation to Jesus himself, almost as if they could not announce the kingdom without first telling of him through whom the kingdom was made present. The fundamental gospel became centered on the christological identity of the risen Jesus as Messiah and Son of God (see Rom 1:3–4).

## **2. Reception of the Message; Jerusalem Communal Life (2:37–45).**

Having presented this model of preaching, *Acts 2:37–41* now dramatizes in question and answer form the fundamentals of accepting the gospel. What must be done once people believe the christological proclamation (2:36–37)? Peter makes specific demands and then gives a promise. The *first* demand is to “repent.”<sup>14</sup> Acts is showing continuity between the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus (where JBap preached “a baptism of repentance”: Luke 3:3: *metanoia*) and the beginning of the church, between the first demand of the proclamation of the kingdom and the first demand of apostolic preaching.

*Second*, Peter demands that people be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:38b). Although JBap insisted that people receive the baptism of repentance, Jesus did not; in the first three Gospels he is never shown as baptizing anyone.<sup>15</sup> Forgiveness of sins was through the power of his word. For Acts Jesus' power over sin remains, but now it is exercised through baptism; and so in his second demand Peter is going beyond the pattern of Jesus' lifetime. Baptism as a public action<sup>16</sup> is important for our reflection here: Peter is portrayed as asking people to make a visible and verifiable profession of their acceptance of Jesus. This is tantamount to asking people to “join up.” The basic Israelite concept is that God chose to save *a people*, and the renewal of the covenant on Pentecost has not changed that. There is a

<sup>14</sup>Literally the Greek verb *metanoein* (*meta* = “across, over”; *noein* = “to think”) means “to change one's mind, way of thinking, outlook”; for sinners changing one's mind involves repentance. The demand placed on religious people to change their minds cannot fully be met by a once-for-all-time response; they must be willing to change when a new presentation of God's will confronts them. See R. D. Witherup, *Conversion in the New Testament* (Zacchaeus Studies; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1994).

<sup>15</sup>Once in John (3:22) he is said to baptize, but that is corrected and denied in 4:2. In a postresurrectional appearance the Matthean Jesus tells the Eleven (the Twelve minus Judas) to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them (Matt 28:19). There is no reason to think that the readers of Acts would have known this command found only in Matt, especially since it embodies the retrospective experience of the Matthean community toward the end of the 1st century.

<sup>16</sup>Baptism is looked at in different ways in the different books of the NT, and the later theology of baptism represents an amalgamation from those different views.



collective aspect to salvation, and one is saved as part of God's people. The time of the church is beginning, and the importance of the church for God's plan is a direct derivative from the importance of Israel.

*Third*, Peter specifies that baptism must be "in the name of Jesus Christ." The fact that JBap baptized and that Jesus himself was baptized by John was surely an important factor in moving the followers of Jesus to insist on baptism; yet Acts 18:24–19:7 contends that there was a clear distinction between the baptism of John and baptism "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (19:5). We are not certain about procedures in the earliest baptismal practice; but most likely "in the name of" means that the one being baptized confessed who Jesus was (and in that sense spoke his name),<sup>17</sup> e.g., "Jesus is Lord"; "Jesus is the Messiah (Christ)"; "Jesus is the Son of God"; "Jesus is the Son of Man."<sup>18</sup> Such baptismal confessions would explain why titles were so commonly applied to Jesus in the NT.

*Fourth*, after spelling out the demands on those who believe in Jesus, Peter makes a pledge (2:38–39): "You shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, for the promise is . . . to as many as the Lord God calls." (Although there is a challenge to the hearers to change their lives, the priority in conversion belongs to God.) Peter and his companions have received the Holy Spirit, and now they promise that the same Holy Spirit will be given to all believers. In terms of the fundamentals of Christian life there will be no second-class citizens, and the same equality in receiving the gift of the Spirit will prove true when the first Gentiles are baptized (Acts 10:44–48). This principle will need to be recalled when inevitably bickering arises over special roles (I Cor 12).

Acts 2:41 reports that about three thousand of those who heard Peter's sermons met his demands and were baptized; it then proceeds to describe how they lived. The memories are highly selective, so that we have as much a theology of the early church as a history. *A summary in 2:42–47 lists four features in the communal life of the early believers.*<sup>19</sup> The first years in Jerusalem (until about AD 36) are idealized as the time when Christians<sup>20</sup> were

<sup>17</sup>The use of the triadic formula in Matt 28:19 ("name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit") would have been a later development, giving a fuller picture of God's plan of salvation.

<sup>18</sup>John 9:35–38 may be echoing that church's baptismal ceremony involving a question from the baptizer, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" with the response, "Lord, I believe"; and then an act of worship.

<sup>19</sup>On the role of summaries in Acts, see under *Sources* below. The selection of these four features is made from the later vantage point of what the author of Acts judges most important and enduring—the primitive community embodying what a Christian community should be.

<sup>20</sup>Throughout these early chapters of Acts, set in immediately postresurrectional Jerusalem, to speak of Christians or Christianity is an anachronism; no designation is as yet given for those who believed in Jesus. If the author of Acts (11:26) is historically correct, it was at Antioch (seemingly

of one mind (1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12). The four features will be treated in this order: *koinōnia*, prayers, breaking of the bread, and apostles' teaching.

First, *koinōnia* ("fellowship, communion, community"). We have seen that the introduction of baptism showed a remarkable drive toward "joining up," so that those who believe quickly constitute a group. The wide distribution in the NT of the term *koinōnia* (related to *koinos*, "common" as in Koinē Greek) shows that the believers felt strongly that they had much in common. Sometimes translated as "fellowship," more literally it is "communion," i.e., the spirit that binds people together, or "community," i.e., the grouping produced by that spirit. Indeed, *koinōnia* may reflect in Greek an early Semitic name for the Jewish group of believers in Jesus, comparable to the self-designation of the Jewish group responsible for the Dead Sea Scrolls as the *Yahad*, "the oneness, unity."<sup>21</sup> An important aspect described in Acts 2:44–45; 4:34–5:11 is voluntarily sharing goods among the members of the community. While the idealism of Acts exaggerates ("all goods"), the fact that there were common goods in the Dead Sea Scrolls community shows that a picture of sharing is plausible for a Jewish group convinced that the last times had begun and that this world's wealth had lost its meaning.<sup>22</sup> Did such "Christian socialism" impoverish the Jerusalem community? Paul refers to the poor (Christians) in Jerusalem for whom he was collecting money (Rom 15:26; Gal 2:10; I Cor 16:1–3). The willingness of Gentiles in distant churches to share some of their wealth with the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem was for Paul a tangible proof of the *koinōnia* that bound Christians together—an external manifestation of the common faith and common salvation that was at the heart of "community." The importance of keeping this communion is exemplified in Gal 2:9 where Paul deems the outcome of the Jerusalem discussion about the Gentiles *ca.* AD 49 to have been a great success because at the end the leaders of the Jerusalem church gave to him and Barnabas the right hand of *koinōnia*. For Paul it would have been against the

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in the late 30s) that the believers were first called Christians. Yet having noted that, for the sake of simplicity I shall anticipate the terminology.

<sup>21</sup>Another early name may have been "the Way," e.g., Acts 24:14: "According to the Way . . . I worship the God of our Fathers" (also Acts 9:2; 19:9,23; 22:4; 24:22). This was also a DSS self-designation: "When these people join the community [*Yahad*], they . . . go into the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord." It reflects the idealism of the return of Israel from exile (Isa 40:3), when Israel came along "the way" prepared by God to the Promised Land. The designation that became the most popular, i.e., *ekklēsia*, "church," plausibly reflects the first exodus in which Israel came into being, for in Deut 23:2 the Greek OT rendered *qāhāl*, "assembly," by *ekklēsia* to describe Israel in the desert as "the church of the Lord."

<sup>22</sup>More than other Gospels Luke is insistent that wealth is an obstacle to the acceptance of Jesus' standards and that the rich are endangered (1:53; 6:24; 12:20–21; 16:22–23). Although Christians do not know the times or seasons for the final intervention of God's rule/kingdom (Acts 1:7), they esteem values consonant with a theology that this world is not a lasting entity.

very notion of the one Lord and the one Spirit if the *koinōnia* between the Jewish and the Gentile churches had been broken.<sup>23</sup>

*Second*, prayers. Praying for each other was another aspect of *koinōnia*, and the Pauline letters bear eloquent testimony to his constant prayer for the communities he founded. What kind of prayer forms were used by the first Jews who came to believe in Jesus? Since they did not cease to be Jewish in their worship, they continued to say prayers that they had known previously, and new prayers would have been formulated according to Jewish models. Among the latter Acts 2:42 would probably have included the hymns or canticles of the Lucan infancy narrative, which most likely were Christian compositions that Luke adapted and placed on the lips of the first characters of his Gospel (p. 232 above). Like the Jewish hymns of this time (as exemplified in the Books of the Maccabees and the DSS) they are a pastiche of OT echoes. In addition the early Christians would have adopted Jesus' own prayer style, visible in the Lord's Prayer preserved in Luke 11:2–4, some petitions of which echo petitions of synagogue prayers (p. 179 above). Gradually Christian prayer did center on recalling and praising what Jesus had done, reflecting increasing Christian distinctiveness.

*Third*, breaking bread. Acts portrays early Christians like Peter and John going frequently, or even daily, to the Temple to pray at the regular hours (2:46; 3:1; 5:12,21,42). This implies that the first Jews who believed in Jesus saw no rupture in their ordinary worship pattern. The "breaking of bread" (presumably the eucharist) would, then, have been in addition to and not in place of the sacrifices and worship of Israel. Notice the sequence in 2:46: "Day by day attending the Temple together and breaking bread in their homes." How did the first Christians interpret the eucharist? Paul, writing in the mid-50s (I Cor 11:23–26), mentions a eucharistic pattern that was handed on to him (presumably, therefore, from the 30s) and says, "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." The recalling of the Lord's death *may* echo the Jewish pattern of Passover re-presentation (Hebrew: *zikkārôn*; Greek: *anamnēsis*), making present again the great salvific act, now shifted from the exodus to the crucifixion/resurrection. The "until he comes" reflects an eschatological outlook visible in the Lord's Prayer and *Marana tha* (*Mārāna' 'āthā'*: "Our Lord, come"), but now attached to a sacred meal. This expectation may have had a special Jewish background, for the DSS community envisioned the presence of the Messiah at the meal of the last times. That the risen Jesus showed

<sup>23</sup>Only toward the end of the NT period do we get clear evidence that the Christian *koinōnia* has been broken. The author of I John, for whom having *koinōnia* "with us" is necessary in order to have *koinōnia* with the Father and the Holy Spirit, condemns "those who went out from us" as antichrists (1:3; 2:18–19).

himself present at meals (Luke 24:30,41–43; John 21:9–13; Mark 16:14), so that his disciples recognized him in the breaking of the bread (Luke 24:35), may be related to belief in his coming at the celebration of the eucharist.<sup>24</sup> A sacral meal eaten only by those who believed in Jesus was a major manifestation of *koinōnia* and eventually helped to make Christians feel distinct from other Jews.

*Fourth*, teaching of the apostles. The Scriptures were authoritative for all Jews, in particular the Law and the Prophets; this would have been true for the first followers of Jesus as well. Thus, early Christian teaching would for the most part have been Jewish teaching.<sup>25</sup> Points where Jesus modified the Law or differed from other established interpretations of the Law were remembered and became the nucleus of a special teaching. As they passed this on, the Christian preachers would have made their own application to situations that Jesus had not encountered;<sup>26</sup> and this expanded form of what stemmed from Jesus was probably what Acts means by the teaching of the apostles. Such teaching, while secondary to the teaching of the Jewish Scriptures, was authoritative in regard to the specific points it touched. When it was committed to writing, the resultant compositions were on the way to becoming a second set of Scriptures.

The four features characteristic of Jerusalem communal life selected by Acts show both continuity with Judaism and distinctiveness that marked off Jews who believed in Jesus from other Jews. These aspects were in tension, pulling in opposite directions: The first held the Christians close to their fellow Jews whom they met in the synagogal meetings; the second gave to the Christian *koinōnia* identity and the potentiality of self-sufficiency. External factors of rejection and reaction, however, would have to take place before Christians would constitute a distinguishably separate religious group, and that development will be the subject of later chaps. of Acts. Meanwhile chaps. 3–5 use the actions of Peter and John to focus narratives of the earliest interchanges with fellow Jews (before AD 36).

**3. Activity, Preaching, and Trials of the Apostles (3:1–5:42).** The summary statements in 2:43 (wonders done by the apostles) and 2:46 (daily Temple attendance) prepare the way for *the dramatic account of the healing*

<sup>24</sup>In these different details we can find the background of a later theology of the eucharist, e.g., the celebration of the eucharist as a sacrifice can be related to recalling the death of the Lord, and the concept of the real presence of Christ in the eucharist can be related to believing that the risen Lord appeared at meals and would return again at the sacred meal.

<sup>25</sup>This fact is sometimes overlooked by those who search out NT theology or ethics. The points of unique importance mentioned in the NT are like the tip of the iceberg, the bulk of which is the unmentioned, presupposed teaching of Israel.

<sup>26</sup>See the example of two instructions on marriage and divorce, one from the Lord and one from Paul, in I Cor 7:10,12.

that takes place when Peter and John go up to the Temple (3:1–10). Jesus began his ministry by manifesting the healing power of God's rule (kingdom) to the amazement of all (Luke 4:31–37); now we see that Peter and the apostles carry on the same work with the same power. The healing is "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth" (Acts 3:6), i.e., worked through the power of the heavenly Christ, not through any self-sufficiency of the apostles. "By faith in his name, his name has made this [lame] man strong" (3:16).<sup>27</sup>

The Lucan account of Jesus' ministry combined healings and words; here in a similar pattern *Peter's healing is followed by a sermon* (3:11–26). This sermon is meant to illustrate the presentation of Jesus to Jews. As with Peter's sermon on Pentecost,<sup>28</sup> it amalgamates OT echoes and what God has done in Jesus. If the Pentecost sermon began its challenge with the prophecy of Joel that was seen to be fulfilled in what was happening, this sermon will terminate (3:22–26) with a challenge based on the promise of Moses in Deut 18:15 that God would raise up a prophet like him who must be heeded. In 3:19 the demand to "repent" or "change one's mind" (*metanoein*) appears once more, but now with greater specification. The Jews of Jerusalem delivered up and denied Jesus the servant of God in the presence of Pilate who had decided to release him (3:13 = Luke 23:16); they denied the Holy and Just One and asked for a murderer (3:14 = Luke 23:18–19, 25: Barabbas). Yet they acted in ignorance (3:17 = Luke 23:34a)<sup>29</sup> as did their rulers, and accordingly they are being offered this chance to change. In the face of the apostolic preaching, however, ignorance ceases to be an excuse, and change of mind/heart is necessary if they are to receive Jesus as the Messiah when he is sent back from heaven (Acts 3:19–21). The story that follows in Acts will insist that many of the people did change, but most of the Jewish leaders did not.

The apostolic preaching and its success (4:4: five thousand) stirs up wrath and leads to *the arrest Peter and John* (4:1–22). Jesus' own attitude toward resurrection had aroused the opposition of the Sadducees, "who say there is no resurrection" (Luke 20:27–38); and now the priests and the Sadducees are disturbed that Peter and John have been proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead (Acts 4:2). A meeting of the Sanhedrin consisting of rulers, elders, scribes, and chief priests is convened against them (4:5–6), just as a Sanhedrin of the elders of the people, and chief priests and scribes

<sup>27</sup>Jewish respect for the personal name of God (YHWH or Yahweh) and its awesome power is reflected in Christian respect for the name (most often, "Lord") given to Jesus at which "every knee should bow in heaven, on earth, and under the earth" (Phil 2:9–11).

<sup>28</sup>R. F. Zehnle, *Peter's Pentecost Discourse . . . Acts 2 and 3* (SBLMS 15; Nashville: Abingdon, 1971) thinks some of the material in Acts 3 is older than that in Acts 2.

<sup>29</sup>Also Acts 13:27; Rom 10:3; not all the people wanted Jesus to die (Luke 23:27, 48).



was convened against Jesus (Luke 22:66). (In neither case are the Pharisees mentioned as having been directly involved, and that may be historical.) The interrogators focus on the miracle, demanding, “By what name did you do this?”—a question that prepares for the response of Peter: “By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead . . . There is no other name under heaven given to the human race by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:10,12).

Annoyed at the boldness of the religious proclamation of the apostles who were not formally educated in religious matters or the Law of Moses,<sup>30</sup> the Sanhedrin authorities blusteringly cut short debate and arbitrarily order Peter and John not to speak in the name of Jesus (4:18). Less than two months before, Peter in the high priest’s house had denied Jesus three times; now before a battery of chief priests he cannot be silent about Christ (4:19–20). Among the Gospels Luke alone (22:31–32) had Jesus pray that, although Satan desired to sift Peter and the others like wheat, Peter’s faith would not fail and he would turn and strengthen his brethren. Here we see the prayer fulfilled as Peter and John emerge unyielding from the Sandhedrin to report to their fellow believers what has happened—a report that consists of a *triumphal prayer of praise to God* (Acts 4:23–31) comparing the forces that had been aligned in Jerusalem against Jesus (Herod and Pilate, the Gentiles, and the “peoples” of Israel) to the forces now uttering threats against his followers. All the believers are filled with the Holy Spirit and, thus strengthened, proceed to speak the word of God with boldness (4:31).<sup>31</sup>

To demonstrate that Jesus’ followers were of one heart and soul, a *summary* (4:32–35) emphasizes some of the same features as the earlier summary in 2:42–47, especially holding things in common (*koinos*). Two examples follow. The first involves *Barnabas* (4:36–37), who sold a field and brought the money to the apostles to contribute to the common fund. Besides exemplifying positively the spirit of *koinōnia*, this reference prepares for future narrative. Barnabas is a Levite, and Acts 6:7 will tell us that many priests (who would have been from the tribe of Levi) came to believe. Moreover, Barnabas is from Cyprus; and when later at Antioch he becomes a missionary with Paul, they will first go to Cyprus (13:1–4).

The other example, involving *Ananias and Sapphira* (5:1–11), is negative and illustrates divine punishment of those violating the purity of the early community. No story captures better the Israelite mentality of the early be-

<sup>30</sup>That is the probable meaning of *agrammatotai*, “unlettered,” in Acts 4:13. An exaggerated interpretation would portray the apostles as illiterate.

<sup>31</sup>Matt 27:51; 28:2 had the earth quake as a manifestation of supportive divine power when Jesus died and rose; Acts has it quake as the Holy Spirit manifests God’s supporting presence in the community of believers.

lievers. The Twelve were meant to sit on thrones judging Israel (Luke 22:30); here through Peter judgment is exercised on the renewed Israel. In the OT (Josh 7) Israel's attempt to enter victoriously beyond Jericho into the heart of the Promised Land was frustrated because Achan had secretly hidden for himself goods that were to be dedicated to God. His deception caused God to judge that Israel had sinned and needed purification. Only when Achan was put to death and his goods burned could Israel proceed as a people who had to be perfect as God is perfect. So also the renewed Israel has been profaned by the deceptive holding back of goods which were claimed to have been contributed to the common fund. Satan entered into Judas, one of the Twelve, to give Jesus over (Luke 22:3–4); and now he has entered into the heart of Ananias, a believer in Jesus, to lie to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3). The impurity is eradicated by the judgment of Peter that brings about the fatal action of God. It is in describing the fear produced by this intervention that Acts uses the term “church” for the first time (5:11).<sup>32</sup>

The *second confrontation of the apostles with the Sanhedrin* (5:12–42), having many parallels to the first, illustrates the author's affection for symmetrically paired passages as a way of intensifying an issue. This time not one healing but many signs and wonders are involved. People even from the surrounding villages begin to bring their sick to be cured by the apostles, especially by Peter. Once again the high priests and the Sadducees have the apostles arrested but are frustrated when an angel of the Lord releases them so that they return to the Temple—a release all the more ironical because the Sadducees do not believe in angels. Thus the Sanhedrin session called to discuss the apostles has to have them arrested again; and as with the arrest of Jesus (Luke 22:6), care has to be taken not to arouse the people (Acts 5:26). Peter expresses his defiance of the high priest with a memorable line: “We must obey God rather than human beings,” and then gives a christological sermon as though he hoped to convert the Sanhedrin (5:30–32).

The engendered fury reaches the point of wanting to kill the apostles (5:33), but is interrupted by the intervention of the famous Pharisee Gamaliel I (who would have been living in Jerusalem at this time). Scholars have debated endlessly whether this part of the scene is historical.<sup>33</sup> Far more important is the place of the scene in the Lucan storyline. Acts has not mentioned Pharisees as opposed to the followers of Jesus; and now it has Gama-

<sup>32</sup>Obviously the author does not think that such an act of judgment is alien to the nature of the church. We are very close here to an early understanding of the power to bind and to loose!

<sup>33</sup>There are anachronisms in Gamaliel's speech, e.g., he mentions Theudas' revolt and “after him Judas the Galilean.” If this Sanhedrin session took place around AD 36, Theudas' revolt had not yet taken place, and Judas' revolt had taken place thirty years before.

liel the Pharisee advocating tolerance for them.<sup>34</sup> Offering examples of other movements that failed, he summarizes the situation, “If this work is from human beings, it will fail; if it is from God, you will not be able to overthrow it.”<sup>35</sup> Gamaliel’s advice carries the day. Although the apostles are beaten, they are released; and tacitly the Sanhedrin adopts the policy of leaving them alone as they continue every day to preach Christ publicly and privately (5:42).

**4. The Hellenists: Toleration; Stephen’s Trial and Martyrdom (6:1–8:1a).**<sup>36</sup> After the Sanhedrin session at which Gamaliel spoke, Acts begins (*ca.* AD 36?) an era in which, except for the brief rule of the Jewish king Herod Agrippa I over Palestine (AD 41–44; Acts 12:1–23), the branch of the Jerusalem church closely associated with the Twelve was not persecuted.<sup>37</sup> (That period would come to an end in AD 62 when James, the brother of the Lord and leader of the Jerusalem church, was put to death.) This is not implausible, for within those years (36–40, 45–62) Paul could go to Jerusalem at least three times and see the church leaders without any indication of secrecy.

However, the removal of the external threat did not mean that all was well. Suddenly, after the picture of the church as being of one mind, *Acts 6:1–6 tells us about a hostile division among Jerusalem Christians*, a division that will bring persecution on a segment of them and lead eventually to a great missionary enterprise. Probably here Acts draws on an old tradition, and the account is sketchy. Common goods are no longer a sign of *koinōnia*, for two groups of Jewish believers within the Jerusalem community are fighting over them. Why? The designation of one group as Hellenists (Greeklike) whose leaders have Greek names (6:5) suggests that they were Jews who spoke (only?) Greek and who were raised acculturated to Greco-Roman civilization. Deductively by contrast, then, the other group called the Hebrews would have spoken Aramaic or Hebrew (sometimes Greek as well) and would have been more culturally Jewish in outlook.<sup>38</sup> Beyond the cultural

<sup>34</sup>Acts (22:3) will present Paul as having studied with this great teacher of the Law who is depicted here as a fair-minded man. Later 23:6–9 will have the Pharisees supporting tolerance for Paul over against the Sadducees.

<sup>35</sup>It may not be true that every religious movement that is of human origin fails; nevertheless, the church would have been wiser many times in its history if it had used Gamaliel’s principle to judge new developments in Christianity rather than reacting in a hostile manner too quickly.

<sup>36</sup>E. Richard, *Acts 6:1–8:4: The Author’s Method of Composition* (SBLDS 41; Missoula: Scholars, 1978).

<sup>37</sup>To forestall an objection, let me point out that the Hellenist branch of the Jerusalem church (e.g., Stephen) was persecuted; but in that persecution and expulsion the “apostles” were not bothered (Acts 8:1b).

<sup>38</sup>Paul, a strict Law-observant Jew, who probably knew Hebrew or Aramaic as well as Greek, considered himself a Hebrew (II Cor 11:22; Phil 3:5), whether or not that designation meant the same to him as it did to the author of Acts.

difference apparently there was also a theological difference. The apostles, who were clearly Hebrew Christians, have not let their faith in Jesus stop them from worshiping in the Temple (2:46; 3:1; 5:12,21). However, Stephen, who will become the Hellenist leader, speaks as if the Temple has no more meaning (7:48–50). In fact, we know that Jews of this period were sharply divided over whether the Jerusalem Temple was the sole place on earth at which sacrifice could be offered to God; and so it is not improbable that Jews of opposite persuasions on that issue may have become believers in Jesus. In any case the disagreement among these Jerusalem Christians has been translated into finances (as have many inner-church fights ever since) because the Hebrews (surely the larger group) are attempting to force the Hellenists to conformity by shutting off common funds from the Hellenist widows, who presumably were totally dependent on this support.

In order to deal with this situation the Twelve summon “the multitude” of the disciples (perhaps a technical name for those who could vote) to settle the issue. In this session the Twelve avoid the obvious, simple solutions. Although Hebrews themselves, they do not demand that the Hellenists either conform or leave. Moreover, they refuse to take over the administration of the common goods; specifically they do not wish to involve themselves in waiting on or serving<sup>39</sup> tables in order to ensure a fair distribution of food. Rather they wished to allow the Hellenists to have their own leaders and administrators of common goods.

This brief scene offers important subjects for reflection. *First*, nowhere do we see more clearly the unique role of the Twelve maintaining the wholeness of God’s renewed people. They preserve the *koinōnia* by their solution, for the Hellenists are to remain as fully recognized brothers and sisters in Christ.

*Second*, the acceptance of the suggestion made by the Twelve was a decision in the early church for pluralism and for what we have come to call today “the hierarchy of doctrine.” The cultural and theological disagreements that existed in Jerusalem between the Hebrews and the Hellenists were implicitly being judged as less important than their common belief in Jesus. Most believers in Jesus decided very early that it was better to tolerate certain differences of practice and thought rather than to destroy a *koinōnia* based on christology (but see n. 23 above).

*Third*, in terms of church structure, no blueprint had come from Jesus showing how the community of those who believed in him was to be admin-

<sup>39</sup>Because the verb “to wait on, serve” in Acts 6:2 is *diakonein*, this scene has come to be interpreted as the establishment of the first deacons. The position of the Hellenist leaders who are selected in this scene is not similar to that of the deacons described in the Pastoral Letters. See Chapter 30 below, n. 11.

istered. By the time described in Acts 6 (*ca.* AD 36?) believers are increasing in numbers and are arguing with one another—two sociological factors that always produce a need for defining leadership more clearly. Accordingly we hear of the seven who become the administrators for the Hellenist believers. Probably administrators also emerge for the Hebrew Christian community at the same time, for henceforth James (the brother of the Lord) and the elders (presbyters) appear as authorities in Jerusalem, alongside the apostles (Acts 11:30; 12:17; 15:2; 21:18). The choice of administrators in 6:6 is done in the context of praying and the laying on of hands. Although development of church structure reflects sociological necessity, in the Christian self-understanding the Holy Spirit given by the risen Christ guides the church in a way that allows basic structural development to be seen as embodying Jesus Christ's will for his church.

*Fourth*, as depicted in Acts, the Twelve made a good proposal, approved by “the multitude” of the Jerusalem community. Nevertheless, none of those present at this meeting could have foreseen how far their decision would lead.<sup>40</sup> In keeping the Hellenists within the Christian *koinōnia* the Jerusalem community now becomes responsible for the actions and preaching of the Hellenist leaders. The chief priests and the Sanhedrin had implicitly decided to extend grudging tolerance to those who believed in the risen Christ; but that did not mean they would tolerate attacks on the Temple from believers in Jesus any more than they tolerated it from other Jews.

A *summary* (6:7) about the spread of the word of God and the conversion of priests sets the stage for *a conflict centered on Stephen* (6:8–8:1a). The first-ranking among the Hellenists, Stephen, stirs up opposition at a Jerusalem synagogue attended largely by foreign Jews. They drag him before a Sanhedrin and level a (false) charge about the message he is preaching—in general his words against Moses and the Law, and specifically that Jesus would destroy the Temple sanctuary. In his long speech (Acts 7:2–53) in response to the Temple charge Stephen will phrase those radical implications in the climactic statement: “The Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands” (7:48).

Although Acts gives us speeches of Peter and Paul, none is so elaborate as the speech of Stephen.<sup>41</sup> His survey of the salvation-history from the patri-

<sup>40</sup>The results of major church decisions can go beyond what was foreseen, with no way to stop at a point judged prudent; see below (pp. 305–6) on the Jerusalem conference of Acts 15.

<sup>41</sup>Is the greater attention because the Christianity that exists in the author's lifetime has now followed the path of Stephen in terms of rejection of the Temple rather than the path of Peter and Paul, both of whom are described as worshiping in the Temple? For overall views: M. H. Scharlemann, *Stephen: A Singular Saint* (AnBib 34; Rome: PBI, 1968); J. J. Kilgallen, *The Stephen Speech* (AnBib 67; Rome: PBI, 1976); *Biblica* 70 (1989), 173–93; D. Wiens, *Stephen's Sermon and the Structure of Luke-Acts* (N. Richland Hills, TX: Bibal, 1995).



arch Abraham to Israel's entrance into the Promised Land under Moses and Joshua has fascinated scholars since elements in it do not seem to reflect standard OT understanding. Some have even proposed that we have here reflections of a Samaritan background<sup>42</sup> harmonious with the mission in Samaria that will soon be undertaken by the Hellenists. The last verses are astoundingly polemic from a prisoner in the dock, for Stephen accuses his hearers of giving over and murdering the just Jesus even as their fathers persecuted the prophets. Not surprisingly this accusation brings rage against Stephen to the boiling point, and he is cast out of the city and stoned to death (7:54–60). The scene is truly significant, not only because Stephen is the first Christian martyr, but also because the death of Stephen in Acts matches so closely the death of Jesus in Luke. Both accounts speak of the Son of Man at the right hand of God (Luke 22:69; Acts 7:56); both have a prayer for the forgiveness of those who are effecting this execution (Luke 23:34a; Acts 7:60); both have the dying figure commend his spirit heavenward (Luke 23:46; Acts 7:59). In the figure of Peter Acts has shown continuity with Jesus' ministry of healing and preaching; in the figure of Stephen Acts has shown continuity with Jesus' death. And just as Jesus' death was not the end because the apostles would receive his Spirit to carry on the work, the death of Stephen is not the end, for observing is a young man named Saul (7:58). He consents to the death (8:1a), but in God's providence he will continue the work of Stephen.

## MISSIONS IN SAMARIA AND JUDEA (8:1b–12:25)

**1. Dispersal from Jerusalem; Philip and Peter in Samaria (8:1b–25).** Acts 1:8 laid out the divine plan of evangelizing: "You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." We have heard witness (*martyria*) borne in Jerusalem culminating with the martyrdom of Stephen; now we are to hear preaching in the next two regions as the Hellenists are scattered throughout Judea and Samaria (8:1b; 9:31).<sup>43</sup> The major step of moving outside Jerusalem to preach to a wider audience is not the result of planning but of persecution. Those who are expelled and become the missionaries to other areas are the Hellenists, the more radical Christians in terms of their relation to Jewish Temple worship. Missionary

<sup>42</sup>See the debate between C.H.H. Scobie, NTS 19 (1973), 390–414 and R. Pummer, NTS 22 (1976), 441–43. Also Munck, *Acts*, Appendix V, 285–300.

<sup>43</sup>In the complicated description of 8:1b, Acts tells us that the apostles (and seemingly the Hebrew Christians) were not expelled, presumably because they did not propagandize against the Temple as the Hellenists did. In this persecution a ferocious agent is Saul, whose conversion will be dramatically recounted in Acts 9.

activity in itself might have been neutral in the attitude it inculcated toward Judaism, but with the Hellenists as spokesmen it was bound to be a centrifugal force. Their converts to Jesus would have no deep attachment to prominent features of Jewish worship.

According to Acts 8:5 the Hellenists go to the Samaritans and thus begin preaching Jesus to nonJews. (Later [11:19–20] in Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch some preach to Gentiles.) The Hellenists were ideally suited to evangelize Samaria since Samaritans did not accept the Jerusalem Temple as the only place of worship.<sup>44</sup> Their successful proclamation attracts Simon Magus.<sup>45</sup> Yet the one to confront him is Peter, not Philip, the Hellenist successor of Stephen; for the Jerusalem church, having heard of the Hellenist success, has sent Peter and John that the Samaritans might receive the Holy Spirit.<sup>46</sup> Simon wants the apostles' power and offers money for it, thus forever dubiously immortalizing his name in "simony." Peter challenges him to repent; yet unlike Stephen's prayer for his adversaries, this promotion of repentance is qualified as to whether Simon can really change his heart (8:22–23). On their way back to Jerusalem Peter and John too preach to Samaritans (8:25).

**2. Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch En Route to Gaza (8:26–40).** More Hellenist evangelizing takes place in the southern part of Judea, manifesting geographical spread. The Ethiopian eunuch, minister of Candace,<sup>47</sup> is from an exotic region in Africa (probably not modern Ethiopia, but Sudan or Nubia to the south of Egypt—one of "the ends of the earth"). He is reading Isaiah, and the Hellenist Philip's ability to interpret the prophet in order to explain Christ is a continuation of the risen Jesus' interpreting the Scriptures for his disciples (Luke 24:27,44–45). Although Deut 23:2(1) would rule out the admission of the castrated into the community of Israel, Philip has no hesitation about meeting the eunuch's request to be baptized into the community of the renewed Israel. (Was Philip acting out the eschatological

<sup>44</sup>Many think that there is a Hellenist strain in John, the only Gospel where Jesus goes into Samaria and gains Samaritan followers. If so, in John 4:21 we may be hearing the type of preaching done in Samaria by the Hellenists: "You will worship the Father neither on this mountain [Gerizim, the Samaritan holy place] nor in Jerusalem."

<sup>45</sup>This curious figure later became a subject of speculation, figuring in legend as the great adversary of Christianity. Does the designation of Simon as "the Power of God called Great" mean that he related himself to a gnostic emanation that stands between the distant, hidden God and human beings? Is categorizing him as a *magus* Acts' contemptuous classification of a gnostic teacher? Does the author of Acts include the story of Simon's defeat because already gnostics were making Simon a hero?

<sup>46</sup>Acts gives the impression that granting the Spirit required the collaboration of the Twelve. Here one suspects that the basic purpose of the apostolic visitation was to verify whether the conversion of such outsiders as the Samaritans was reconcilable with Jesus' proclamation.

<sup>47</sup>Acts presents Candace as the personal name of the Ethiopian queen; it seems, however, to have been a title.

benevolence of Isa 56:3–5 toward eunuchs?) That openness prepares us for the admission of Gentiles, and by way of transition Acts stops here to tell us about Saul/Paul who would be the great emissary to the Gentiles.

**3. Saul En Route to Damascus; Return to Jerusalem and Tarsus (Acts 9:1–30).** After narrating here the account of the conversion of Saul/Paul, the author will report it twice more from Paul's lips in his speeches of self-defense (22:3–21; 26:2–23).<sup>48</sup> In those later versions the vocation to evangelize the Gentiles will be blended into the conversion account. Here the author is content to move in stages: Ananias, who cures and baptizes him, is told of the future mission, but not Saul himself. Yet clearly, because of all that is to be accomplished through this "vessel of election" (9:15), Acts is very interested in recounting his dramatic conversion effected by Jesus himself.<sup>49</sup> The dramatic touches of the story are superb, e.g., the personalizing of the Saul's hostility in 9:4, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute *me*?" The reluctance of Ananias to have anything to do with Saul despite the Lord's instruction highlights the metamorphosis of Saul from a truly fearsome persecutor. Acts is very careful to report that Saul received the Holy Spirit (9:17), for Paul's proclamation will eventually be as potent as was that of Peter and the others who received the Spirit at Pentecost. In significant harmony with Acts' previous stress on christological belief, the new convert preaches that "Jesus is the Son of God" (9:20). Acts also lays the basis for the future activity of Barnabas with Paul by telling us that it was Barnabas who supported Saul against those in Jerusalem who could not believe that the persecutor had now changed.<sup>50</sup> Probably under the constraint of actual chronology, Acts postpones the most famous activities of Saul/Paul by telling us that he went back to Tarsus (9:30); his great mission will be described later after the author tells us more about Peter. By way of narrative procedure the overlapping of the two figures helps to show that the same gospel is preached by both.

<sup>48</sup>For Luke's pattern of recurrent narration see M.-E. Rosenblatt in Richard, *New* 94–105; R. D. Witherup, *JSNT* 48 (1992), 67–86.

<sup>49</sup>The risen Jesus appeared on earth to the Twelve and then departed to heaven whence he now speaks to Saul. Does that mean that the author of Acts posits a qualitative difference of status between the Twelve and Paul in terms of their experience of Christ? I Cor 15:5–8, from Paul himself, would give the impression that there was no difference in the appearances of the risen Jesus to Peter or the Twelve (or James) and the appearance to Paul (except that they are listed first, he is last).

<sup>50</sup>Acts 9:19b–30 recounts Paul's preaching in Damascus, his facing a Jewish conspiracy after many days, and his being lowered in a basket over the wall to escape to Jerusalem where, after Barnabas brings him to the apostles, he preaches and debates insistently before being sent off to Tarsus. There is a famous discrepancy between this and Paul's own account in Gal 1:15–22: After the revelation he did not go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles but went immediately to Arabia; then he returned to Damascus, before going after three years to Jerusalem for fifteen days, where he saw and conversed only with Cephas (Peter) and James, and finally went on to Syria and Cilicia (still not known by face to the churches of Christ in Judea). Possibly Paul's brief summary of what happened nearly twenty years before is imprecise; probably the author of Acts had heard only a simplified version. See Chapter 16 below, subsection A.

**4. Peter at Lydda, Joppa, Caesarea, and Back to Jerusalem (9:31–11:18).** The first of the Twelve was the spokesman of apostolic missionary activity in Jerusalem (Acts 2–5); but when the church began spreading to Judea and Samaria, the Hellenists and Saul took center stage (with Peter invoked chiefly to face Simon Magus). Now, however, with the church at peace (9:31—a *transitional summary*), Peter returns to the fore. Previously we have seen that in the name of Jesus Peter could heal and preach. *Peter's cure of Aeneas at Lydda* (9:32–35) with the command to rise echoes closely Jesus' cure of the paralyzed man (Luke 5:24–26). Even more closely *Peter's revivification of Tabitha at Joppa* (9:36–43) resembles Jesus' action in raising the daughter of Jairus (Luke 8:49–56).<sup>51</sup> No power has been withheld from the church, not even the power over death itself. Now, however, we are about to move beyond the parallels to Jesus' ministry to a new area. The Lucan Gospel account of Jesus began and ended in the Jerusalem Temple. What Peter does next will start a chain of actions that will eventually take Christianity outside Judaism to Gentiles<sup>52</sup> and to Rome, the representative of the ends of the earth.

*In 10:1–48 the author as a third-person reporter recounts how Peter is led by the Spirit to baptize Cornelius* (and his household), a Gentile who participates in synagogue prayers and accepts the moral demands of Judaism.<sup>53</sup> *In 11:1–18 Peter repeats what happened with a first-person report* as he defends his behavior before the Jerusalem Christians. (As with Paul's repetitions of the story of his conversion, the duplication signals that this is an account of pivotal importance.) There are six subdivisions in the Acts narrative: (a) 10:1–8: The pious Roman centurion Cornelius receives a vision of an angel of God at Caesarea telling him to send to Joppa for Simon called Peter; (b) 10:9–16: At Joppa Peter receives a vision telling him three times that foods traditionally considered ritually unclean are in fact not unclean; (c) 10:17–23a: Pondering the vision, Peter receives the men sent by Cornelius who ask him to come to Cornelius's house; (d) 10:23b–33: Cornelius

<sup>51</sup>The Marcan parallel (5:41) to the latter has "*Talitha koum(i)*," which is remarkably like the order "*Tabitha, rise*" in Acts 9:40. For resuscitations, see Chapter 11 below, n. 41.

<sup>52</sup>The author portrays a gradual enlargement: Peter dealing with a sympathetic Gentile (chap. 10); the Hellenists preaching to the Greek-speaking Gentiles (11:19–20); then Barnabas and Saul sent out from Antioch, at first preaching to the Jews in the synagogues but gradually turning their attention to Gentiles (13:4ff.), who become the chief concern.

<sup>53</sup>Luke refers to such Gentile sympathizers to Judaism who did not become converts as God-fearers (or God-worshippers: 10:2,22; 13:43; 17:4,17). There has been a debate about the accuracy of such a designation: A. T. Kraabel, *Numen* 28 (1981), 113–26; and (with R. S. MacLennan) *BAR* 12 (#5, 1986), 46–53,64. However, M. C. de Boer in Tuckett, *Luke's Literary* 50–71, shows that Luke scarcely invented this terminology for such people who certainly existed. Tyson, *Images* 35–39, contends that these are the readers to whom the author has directed Luke-Acts, represented in the text by Cornelius, the Ethiopian eunuch, and Theophilus (see Chapter 9 above, n. 92). For an analysis of the Cornelius story, see R. D. Witherup, *JSNT* 49 (1993), 45–66.

receives Peter and they compare visions; (e) 10:34–49: Peter preaches a sermon, and the Holy Spirit comes upon the uncircumcised present, so that Peter commands them to be baptized; (f) 11:1–18: Returning to Jerusalem, Peter has to account for his boldness in baptizing Gentiles.

Because there are heavenly revelations to both Cornelius and Peter, readers are meant to recognize that what occurs here is uniquely God's will. Such an emphasis was probably necessary because of the controversial nature of the two issues involved. First, were Christians bound by the Jewish rules for kosher foods? The thesis that in God's eyes all foods are ritually clean (10:15) constitutes a major break from Jewish practice, a break now to be supported not only by Hellenist radicals but also by the first of the Twelve. Gradually the extent to which new wine cannot be put into old wineskins (Luke 5:37) is becoming apparent. Often modern Jewish and Christian scholars, studying the history of this early period and regretting the great rift that opened between Christianity and Judaism, suggest that if in the 1st century there had been more tolerance and understanding on both sides, the split could have been avoided. Some indications in the NT, however, suggest that the *radical implications* of Jesus were really irreconcilable with major tenets and practices of Judaism.<sup>54</sup>

Second, did *Gentiles* have to be circumcised to receive baptism and the grace of Christ?<sup>55</sup> Implicitly or explicitly those who insisted that Gentiles needed to be circumcised (i.e., become Jews) were maintaining that being a Jew had primacy over faith in Christ in terms of God's grace. Peter is pictured as rejecting that by word and deed in 10:34–49. Scholars debate whether the author of Acts is historical in presenting Peter as the first to accept uncircumcised Gentiles into the Christian *koinōnia*. One may argue from 11:19–20 that the Hellenists were the first to do this, and clearly later Paul was the greatest spokesman for the practice. Yet since Paul portrays Peter (or Cephas) as present at Antioch dealing with Gentiles (Gal 2:11–12) and perhaps at Corinth (I Cor 1:12; 9:5), what may underlie Acts is the memory that among the Jerusalem leaders Peter was foremost in displaying such openness, whence the ability of Peter or his image to appeal to both sides of the Christian community.<sup>56</sup> In any case Acts 10:44–48 describes the accep-

<sup>54</sup>Related to this issue, see J. Neusner, *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1993).

<sup>55</sup>The NT (including Paul) does not debate whether *Jewish Christian* parents should have their sons circumcised. Those who did so to insure the extra privileges of being Jews (see Rom 9:4–5) could have constituted a problem theologically only if they thought that circumcision was *necessary* (along with baptism) for someone to become a child of God and part of God's people newly chosen in Jesus Christ.

<sup>56</sup>Paul (Gal 2:7) speaks of Peter's having been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised; yet a letter attributed to him, I Peter, is clearly written to Gentile Christians (2:10: "You were once no people").



tance of Cornelius as a major step, accompanied by an outpouring of the Spirit manifested through speaking in tongues, comparable to Pentecost—the beginning of the church of the Gentiles comparable to the beginning of the church of the renewed Israel.<sup>57</sup>

The radical character of what Peter has done and proclaimed is challenged in 11:2–3 by confreres in the church of Jerusalem: “Why did you go to the uncircumcised and eat with them?” It is not clear whether at heart this Christian “circumcision party” was altogether opposed to converting Gentiles to belief in Christ or was simply insisting that Gentiles could be converted only after they had become Jews. Peter answers the circumcision party by telling about his visions and the coming of the Spirit upon Cornelius’ household. This existential argument silences the circumcision party (for the moment) and leads to the acceptance of Gentiles into existing Jewish Christian groups (11:18). But the issue has not been fully resolved, as Acts 15 will show us after it has depicted an active mission to Gentiles.

**5. Antioch; Jerusalem; Herod’s Persecution; Peter’s Departure (11:19–12:25).** Attention now switches from the church in Jerusalem to *the church in Antioch* (11:19–26), where the followers of Jesus were first called Christians, the name by which they would be known for the rest of time. As part of his technique of simultaneity, the author now picks up the Hellenists’ story broken off in chap. 8 when they were scattered from Jerusalem to Samaria. Belatedly we are told that they went also to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch (in Syria), preaching at first only to Jews but then gradually to Gentiles as well. Although a Hebrew Christian like Peter did accept a Gentile household into the community, seemingly the aggressive effort to convert Gentiles began with the Hellenists. When Jerusalem heard this, Barnabas was sent to Antioch to check on the development; and he approved it (11:22–23). This becomes the occasion of bringing to Antioch Saul, who was last heard of in 9:30. Thus, while the Jerusalem church in the person of Peter is taking the first steps toward admitting a few Gentiles, Antioch develops as a second great Christian center, more vibrantly involved in mission.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup>Some today contend that “baptism in the Spirit” is distinct from and superior to baptism in water, basing their position on the sequence in Acts. That is not an issue in Acts, however. According to his purpose and interests the author shows: (a) the Twelve and those together with them receiving the Spirit without (ever) being baptized in water; (b) people being baptized (in water) and then receiving the gift of the Spirit (2:38; 19:5–6); (c) people receiving the Spirit before being baptized in water (here); (d) people having been baptized in water (with the baptism of John) who never even knew that there was a Holy Spirit (18:24–19:7).

<sup>58</sup>There were different missions conducted by the first Jews who believed in Jesus, reflecting different theologies; see my article in CBQ 45 (1983), 74–79. However, M. D. Goulder, *A Tale of Two Missions* (London: SCM, 1994), carries this too far by rejecting the idea of a unified church. From our evidence, despite differences, the first Christians would have thought of themselves as unified in the *koinōnia* of the renewed Israel.

The development of the Antioch base is a grace because just at this time Jerusalem and Judea are hit particularly hard by *a famine foretold by Agabus* (11:27–30) and by a changed political situation where direct Roman rule had been replaced in AD 41–44 by a Jewish kingdom leading to *persecution of Christians under Herod Agrippa I* (12:1–23). The famine offers the Antiochene Christians a chance to display *koinōnia* by sharing goods with the poorer believers in Judea; the persecution offers the Jerusalem Christians an opportunity to bear witness by martyrdom, for James, son of Zebedee, brother of John, and one of the Twelve, is put to death.<sup>59</sup> Whereas hitherto in Luke-Acts there was a tendency to distinguish between the Jewish people (more favorable to Jesus) and their rulers, 12:3,11 associates the Jewish people with the anti-Christian hostility of Herod. Readers are being prepared for a situation in which Judaism and Christianity are not only distinct but hostile.

Great danger threatens when Peter is arrested; but God intervenes through an angel to release him, even as God intervened by an angel to release him when he was arrested by the Sanhedrin (5:19). Later an earthquake will free Paul when he is in prison in Philippi (16:26). These divine interventions show God's care for the great spokesmen of the gospel.<sup>60</sup> That Peter, after his escape from Herod, goes to another place (12:17) has given rise to the imaginative, but probably wrong, tradition that at this juncture Peter went to Rome and founded the church there. That Peter, as he leaves Jerusalem, sends word to James (the “brother” of Jesus but not one of the Twelve) has been interpreted, also wrongly, as his passing the control of the church (and even the primacy) to James. However, one should distinguish between the roles of the two men: Peter, the first of the Twelve to see the risen Jesus, is always named first among them and would have a unique role in the church at large because of that; there is no evidence that Peter was ever local administrator of the Jerusalem church—a role of administration rejected for the Twelve in 6:2. Probably as soon as there was an administrative role created for the Hebrew element of the Jerusalem church, James held it, not illogically because he was related to Jesus by family ties.<sup>61</sup> In any case Peter's

<sup>59</sup>This is James the Greater who in legend went to Spain (venerated at Compostela) and evidently came back again to Judea soon enough to die about AD 41! He must be kept distinct from other NT Jameses, especially James the “brother” of Jesus (Chapter 34 below). As explained above in relation to 1:21–26, members of the Twelve are not replaced when they die.

<sup>60</sup>In the light of such tradition, one can imagine later Christian puzzlement when neither Peter nor Paul escaped Nero's arrest at Rome where they were executed. Would some have judged that the emperor was more powerful than Christ? Perhaps that is why a book like Revelation had to stress so firmly that the Lamb could and would conquer the beast representing imperial power.

<sup>61</sup>This relationship would have been very significant to those who emphasized Jesus as a royal Messiah of the House of David. The dominant Gospel evidence is that the “brothers” of Jesus were not disciples during his lifetime (Mark 3:31–35; 6:3–4; John 7:5); but the risen Jesus appeared to James (I Cor 15:7), and James was an apostle in Jerusalem at the time of Paul's conversion (Gal 1:19; *ca.* AD 36). Cf. W. Schmithals, *Paul and James* (SBT 46; London: SCM, 1965).

departure from Jerusalem was not a permanent one; he had returned by the time of the meeting in that city described in Acts 15 (*ca.* AD 49). Acts finishes the colorful story of the frustrated persecution by describing (12:23) the horrible death of being eaten by worms visited by God on King Herod Agrippa in AD 44. It is quite similar to the death of the great enemy of Israel, King Antiochus Epiphanes, in II Macc 9:9. Both accounts are theological interpretations of sudden death: Those who dare to raise their hand against God's people face divine punishment.

The stories of *famine and persecution at Jerusalem end on a triumphal note* (12:24–25): The persecutor has fallen; God's word grows and multiplies; and Barnabas and Saul bring back to Antioch John Mark (the evangelist?—pp. 158–60 above).

#### MISSIONS OF BARNABAS AND SAUL CONVERTING GENTILES; APPROVAL AT JERUSALEM (13:1–15:35)<sup>62</sup>

**1. Antioch Church Sends Barnabas and Saul; Mission to Cyprus and SE Asia Minor (13:1–14:28).** This section begins with a *short description of the church of Antioch* (13:1–3). If Jerusalem has the apostles (*i.e.*, the Twelve), Antioch has prophets and teachers, among whom Acts places Barnabas and Saul.<sup>63</sup> Barnabas is listed first and Saul, last; only during the mission will the name Paul begin to be used consistently in place of Saul and the order reversed to Paul and Barnabas (*e.g.*, 13:13,43). In other words in the mission the great proclaimer of the gospel will find his identity and status.

We are told that the Antiochene prophets and teachers were “performing a liturgical service [*leitourgein*] to the Lord and fasting.” As promised in Luke 5:34–35, the days have now come when the bridegroom has been taken away and fasting has become a part of early church life. What did the liturgical service consist of? Was it a eucharist?<sup>64</sup> In this context of prayer and fasting, hands are laid on Barnabas and Saul. We should not anachronistically speak of this as an ordination; it is a commissioning by the church of Antioch for a mission that is often counted as the first Pauline journey and dated to AD 46–49.

<sup>62</sup>One could start the mission “to the end of the earth” (1:8) here rather than in 15:36 (see below). These chaps. 13:1–15:35 are more initiatory and exploratory than the chaps. that follow.

<sup>63</sup>Cf. I Cor 12:28: “God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers . . .” Paul thought of himself as an apostle, but not in the Lucan sense of the Twelve.

<sup>64</sup>In Luke 22:14,19 “Do this in commemoration of me” is addressed to the apostles. But in a eucharist at Antioch where the Twelve were not present, who would have presided? About the turn of the 1st century *Didache* 10:7 depicts a situation where prophets celebrated the eucharist, and that may have been the custom earlier as well.

Along with John Mark, *Barnabas and Saul go to Cyprus (13:4–12)*, Barnabas' home territory; and they speak in the Jewish synagogues. Since in his own writings Paul speaks of converting Gentiles, scholars have wondered whether Acts is accurate here. But the Pauline letters are to churches evangelized in later missionary journeys at a time when Paul had turned to converting Gentiles—a development that may have stemmed from experiment if he found (as Acts indicates) more success with them.<sup>65</sup> Saul's encountering in Cyprus and besting the false prophet and magus, Bar-Jesus, sets up a parallelism with Peter's encountering Simon Magus in Samaria. The enemies of the gospel are not simply earthly forces (as Paul will state clearly in his own letters).

The move from Cyprus to *Antioch of Pisidia in Asia Minor (13:13–50)* may have been a more adventurous extension of the mission than Acts indicates, and perhaps that is what caused John Mark to depart and go to Jerusalem (13:13). A later reference (15:37–39) shows that this departure left a bad memory with Paul. The author makes what happened in Asia Minor at Pisidian Antioch almost an exemplar of the Pauline mission. There Paul (henceforth so named) gives a synagogue sermon (13:16–41) that in its appeal to the OT and summary of what God did in Jesus is not unlike the sermons earlier preached by Peter.<sup>66</sup> Thus we get a picture of a consistent message preached by the two great figures who dominate the story of the early church, Peter and Paul.<sup>67</sup> Acts 13:42–43 reports a generally favorable reaction among Jews and their sympathizers to the sermon, but 13:44–49 shows that on the following Sabbath there was hostility from “the Jews” so that Paul and Barnabas shifted their appeal to the Gentiles.

The Jewish hostility at Antioch continues so that Paul and Barnabas are driven from Pisidia and have to *move on to Iconium (13:51–14:5)*—a rebuff that evidently does not discourage them, for they are “filled with joy and the Holy Spirit” (13:52). In Iconium, where they spend a considerable period,

<sup>65</sup>That in fact Paul was involved with synagogues is strongly suggested by his statement in II Cor 11:24: “Five times I received from Jews thirty-nine lashes”—a synagogue punishment. Even at the end, Acts will continue to show Paul, when he arrives at Rome ca. 61, speaking first to Jews. However, although in Rom 1:16 Paul indicates that Jews came first in the general proclamation of the gospel, in 11:13 he characterizes his own apostolate as “to the Gentiles.”

<sup>66</sup>Undoubtedly the author of Acts composed the speech attributed to Paul; yet the composition is not alien to the christological thought attested in Paul's letters. For instance, Acts 13:23 relates Jesus to David's posterity and 13:33 makes God's raising Jesus the moment of saying, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you.” In Rom 1:3–4 Paul speaks of the one who was “descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead.” In Acts 13:39 there is justification language similar to that of the Pauline letters.

<sup>67</sup>There were disagreements between the two men (Gal 2:11, 14); but when it came to the essential message about Jesus, Paul associates himself with Cephas (Peter) and the Twelve (and James!) in a common preaching and a common demand for belief (I Cor 15:3–11).

both procedure and reaction are much the same; and once again they have to *move on*—*this time to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe* (14:6–21a). In Lystra Paul is depicted as healing a man crippled from birth just as Peter had healed a cripple from birth in 3:1–10—the healing power of Jesus that was passed on to Peter in dealing with the Jews of Jerusalem has been passed on to Paul in dealing with Gentiles. The vivid Gentile reaction, hailing Barnabas and Paul as the gods Zeus and Hermes,<sup>68</sup> catches the ethos of a different world where the message of the one God (14:15–18) has not really taken root, making it all the more difficult to preach Christ. The hostility aroused by the Jews from the previous city pursues Paul; he is stoned and left for dead. (In his own writing Paul will speak eloquently about his suffering for Christ, including being stoned, e.g., II Cor 11:23–27.) But Paul recovers and then goes on with Barnabas to Derbe. *The two disciples retrace their steps through the Asia Minor cities and then sail back to Syrian Antioch* (14:21b–28). In a passing phrase Acts 14:23 has them appointing presbyters (or elders) in every church. Many doubt that this form of structure existed so early.<sup>69</sup> At least we may deduce that by the last third of the 1st century when Acts was written, presbyters existed in these churches and their status was seen as part of the Pauline heritage. The journey ends with a report to the church of Antioch that had sent Paul and Barnabas forth: “God opened a door of faith to the Gentiles” (14:26–27).

## **2. Jerusalem Conference and Approval; Return to Antioch (15:1–35).**

What Paul has done does not please the *circumcision party at Jerusalem who now send people to Antioch* (15:1) to challenge the acceptance of Gentiles without circumcision. One might have thought that this issue was settled at Jerusalem earlier (Acts 11) when Peter justified his acceptance of the Gentile Cornelius without circumcision. It was, however, one thing to incorporate into a largely Jewish Christian community a few Gentiles; it is another to be faced with whole churches of Gentiles such as Paul had founded—churches that would have little relation to Judaism other than holding in veneration the Jewish Scriptures. We can see in Rom 11:13–26 Paul’s understanding of what he thought would happen from his Gentile mission: The Gentiles are a wild olive branch grafted on the tree of Israel; and eventually, through envy, all Israel will come to faith in Christ and be saved. The circumcision party may have been far more realistic in their fears that Paul had

<sup>68</sup>On this slender evidence is based much speculation about the appearance of Paul as short and slight.

<sup>69</sup>Presbyters are never mentioned in the undisputed Pauline letters; the appointment of them is a major issue only in the postPauline Pastoral Epistles. Yet *episkopoi* and *diakonoi* are mentioned in Phil 1:1, and arguments drawn from silence about church structure(s) in Paul’s lifetime are very uncertain.



begun a process whereby Christianity would become almost entirely a Gentile religion, which, of course, is what happened. (Ultraconservatives, as distorted as their theology may be, are often more perceptive about the inevitable direction of changes than are the moderates who propose them.) Far from being grafted on the tree of Israel, the Gentile Christians will become the tree. To stop that foreseeable catastrophe Paul's opponents attack the principle that Gentiles may be admitted without becoming Jews (i.e., being circumcised). They cause so much trouble that *Paul and Barnabas have to go to Jerusalem* (15:2–3) to debate the issue. There follows a report of what may be judged the most important meeting<sup>70</sup> ever held in the history of Christianity, for implicitly *the Jerusalem conference* (15:4–29) decided that the following of Jesus would soon move beyond Judaism and become a separate religion reaching to the ends of the earth.

We are fortunate in having two accounts, one in Acts 15, the other in Gal 2; and this double perspective teaches us much about the great personalities of early Christianity. Scholars tend to prefer Paul's own eyewitness account and to dismiss the Acts account as later bowdlerizing. There is no question that Acts presents a simplified and less acrimonious report; but as regards Gal, we should recognize that a personal account written in self-defense has its own optic, removing it from the realm of the purely objective. For instance, in Gal 2:1 Paul says, "I went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus too along"; Acts 15:2 says that "Paul and Barnabas and some others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem." That they went up commissioned by the church of Antioch may very well be the more accurate picture, even though (as part of his self-defense in Gal) Paul highlights his initiative in co-operating.

Acts indicates that those in Jerusalem had the power of decision on the issue. Paul speaks disparagingly of the "so-called pillars" whose reputation meant nothing to him; but that very title implies that their reputation did mean something to others, and in the long run Paul could not stand alone. Although he received his gospel (of grace freely given to the Gentiles) through a revelation from Jesus Christ and would not change it even if an angel told him to do so (Gal 1:8, 11–12), he mentions the possibility that he had run in vain (2:2). If that is more than an oratorical touch, he may have been admitting the power of the "pillars": Should they deny his Gentile churches *koinōnia* with the mother church in Jerusalem, there would be a division that negated the very nature of the church. Thus, despite Paul's certi-

<sup>70</sup>Although often called the "Council" of Jerusalem, this should not be confused with the later ecumenical councils of the church (Nicaea, etc.).

tude about the rightness of his evangelizing, the outcome of the Jerusalem meeting for the communities he had evangelized involved uncertainty.

To have brought along Titus, an uncircumcised Gentile (Gal 2:3), is a shrewd maneuver. Probably some of the Christian Pharisee advocates of circumcision<sup>71</sup> had never seen any of the uncircumcised Gentiles whom they denied to be true Christians; and it is always more difficult to confront others who patently believe in Christ and tell them face to face, “You are not Christians because you do not agree with me.” Another prudent step by Paul (Gal 2:2) is first to lay out his argument privately before those at Jerusalem who were of repute. Initial reactions of authorities are often defensive; when uttered in private, they can be modified later without loss of face. Public “eyeball-to-eyeball” confrontations with authorities usually prove little more than nearsightedness.

The public disputation at Jerusalem is the core of the story. Four participants are involved, two predictable (on opposite sides: the circumcision advocates and Paul), one less predictable (Peter), and one unpredictable (James). Understandably, given the goal of Gal, Paul’s account is centered on his own role, not yielding submission even for a moment and convincing the reputed pillars of the truth of his gospel. Yet Acts gives the least space to Barnabas and Paul (15:12), sandwiching their report between Peter’s words (15:7–11) and those of James (15:13–21)—an arrangement creating the impression that it was the last who carried the day. One needs to read between the lines of both accounts. The issue under discussion was what Paul and Barnabas had done in their missionary activity, and in that sense the conference was centered on Paul. Yet the real suspense may have been centered on what James would say, since he would carry the Jerusalem church with him. Gal 2:9 implies that by listing James first among the so-called pillars of the church, ahead of Cephas (Peter) and John.

What reasoning was advanced by the participants? Paul recounts deeds done among the Gentiles (Acts) and the gospel he preaches to them (Gal), which surely means an account of how such people had come to faith without circumcision. Peter’s argument is also experiential (Acts): God had sent the Holy Spirit on the uncircumcised Cornelius. James’ argument is reasoned (Acts) and, as might be expected from a conservative Hebrew Christian, draws on the Scriptures. The prophets foretold that the Gentiles would come, and the Law of Moses allowed uncircumcised Gentiles to live among the people of God provided that they abstained from certain listed pollutions.

<sup>71</sup>In place of this more neutral terminology of Acts 15:5. Paul speaks polemically of “false brethren” spying out the freedom of his treatment of the Gentiles.

Unfortunately we do not hear the arguments advanced by the circumcision party, other than the simple statement in Acts 15:5 that the Law of Moses required circumcision.

More significant is a deafening silence about Jesus. No one who favors admitting the Gentiles without circumcision mentions the example of Jesus, saying, “Jesus told us to do so.” And, of course, the reason is that he never did tell them to do so. Indeed, one may suspect that the only ones likely to have mentioned Jesus would have been those of the circumcision party, arguing precisely that there was no authorization from him for such a radical departure from the Law. Even Paul remembers Jesus as “born under the Law” (Gal 4:4). This may have been the first of many times when those who have resisted change in the church did so by arguing that Jesus never did this, whereas those who promoted change did so on the import of Christ for a situation that the historical Jesus did not encounter.<sup>72</sup> In any case, both Acts and Gal agree that Peter (and John) and James kept the *koinōnia* with Paul and his Gentile churches. The road was now open for free and effective evangelizing to the ends of the earth. In fact that road would also lead away from Judaism. Even though the Savior for Gentiles was a Jew born under the Law, Christianity would soon be looked on as a Gentile religion quite alien to Judaism, especially to a Judaism for which the Law would become ever more important once the Temple was destroyed.

Now *Paul and Barnabas go back to Antioch* (15:30–35), carrying a letter of clarification that circumcision was not to be required of Gentile converts. However, the Gentiles are required to abstain from four things proscribed by Lev 17–18 for aliens living among Israel: meat offered to idols; the eating of blood; the eating of strangled animals (i.e., animals that were not ritually slaughtered); and incestuous unions (*porneia*, “impurity,” but here with kin). This is the position that James advocated when he spoke at the Jerusalem conference (15:20). When we compare the picture to Paul’s account in Gal 2:11ff., we realize that the history was surely more complicated.

A plausible combination of the two sources of information might yield the following. Paul and Barnabas go back to Antioch with the good news that freedom from circumcision had been recognized. Struggles develop, however, as to whether Gentile Christians are bound by food laws obeyed by the Jewish Christians who constitute the church alongside them. Paul argues that they are not bound, and Peter participates in this free practice until men

<sup>72</sup>The Synoptic Gospels give attention to Jesus’ reaching out to tax-collectors and prostitutes. Was part of the reason for preserving that memory an implicit rebuttal of the circumcision position? One could construct the rebuttal thus: Jesus did reach out to those outside the Law, and now in our time the Gentiles are the ones outside the Law. One must recognize, however, that such arguments offer their own difficulties, for they can be used to justify almost any practice.

from James come demanding specific practices of the food laws.<sup>73</sup> Peter accedes to James, much to Paul's anger. Paul's loss of such important support may have influenced his departure on his next mission. Paul's letters show that in the churches he evangelizes (where Gentile Christians would have been the majority) his converts are not bound by Jewish food laws. In the area where James of Jerusalem has influence (Acts 15:23: Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, where presumably Jewish Christians are the majority), the Gentiles are bound. The Jerusalem conference preserved *koinōnia* about the essential for conversion: Gentiles do not have to become Jews. However, that did not guarantee uniformity of lifestyle. Paul judges freedom from the food laws so important that he calls it an issue of gospel truth (Gal 2:14); apparently others do not think it that important.

### MISSION OF PAUL TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH (15:36–28:31)

The second half of Acts now becomes almost exclusively the story of Paul. The dispute over food laws is not discussed. Rather we hear of a wide range of travel that will twice bring Paul as far as Corinth in Greece and cover the years AD 50–58. More than likely during that period Paul wrote most of his preserved undisputed correspondence. The combination of the Jerusalem decision that enabled churches freely to accept Gentiles and the Antioch dispute that threw Paul more on his own seems to have catalyzed the most creative time of Paul's life.

**1. From Antioch through Asia Minor to Greece and Return (15:36–18:22).** In the Antioch dispute, Barnabas and John Mark may well have accepted the position demanded by the men from James; for Acts, which is silent about the struggle between Paul and Peter, reports *Paul's quarrel with Barnabas and Mark* (15:36–39), so that they could no longer travel together. Consequently *Paul takes Silas as he sets out on another mission* (15:40–41),<sup>74</sup> the first part of which brings him through Syria and his native Cilicia. Next *Paul revisits Lystra and Derbe* (16:1–5). That visit is the occasion of the circumcision of Timothy, the historicity of which is questioned by schol-

<sup>73</sup>Gal 2:12. Scholars are divided on whether the men from James included Judas and Silas bringing the letter mentioned in Acts. Although Acts 15:25,30 would seem to have Paul and Barnabas carry the letter to Antioch, some ten years later Acts 21:25 has James tell Paul about the letter as if it were news to him.

<sup>74</sup>It is customary to detect in Acts three Pauline missionary journeys, with one journey (AD 46–49) before the Jerusalem conference and two after it (AD 50–52, 54–58—traditional dating; Table 6 below); and when it serves, we shall use that rubric. It is unlikely, however, that Paul understood his missionary life to be so neatly divided; and indeed it is uncertain that the author of Acts made such a division, for it is easy to look on everything from 15:40 to 21:17 as one long journey. What is certain is that, after the Jerusalem decision, Acts describes Paul's major missionary activity as ranging much farther than his first missionary effort.

ars who think it inconceivable that Paul would have changed his stance on circumcision even to win converts. However, if Timothy was looked on as a Jew, there is no clear evidence that Paul would have wanted Jewish Christians to give up circumcision (n. 55 above).

*Paul's moves on through Phrygia and Galatia to Troas (16:6–10).* In the latter site he receives a vision of the man of Macedonia pleading for help that causes him to cross over to Greece. This is seen by the author of Acts as a divinely inspired moment. (The “we” form of narrative begins at Troas and continues through the crossover to Philippi; thus the author’s personal participation may have increased his appreciation of the moment—see *Authorship* below.) The spread of Christian faith to Macedonia (and thus to Europe, although Acts does not highlight the continent) is presented almost as manifest destiny; and in retrospect the tremendous contributions of two thousand years of European Christianity could justify that judgment. Far more than the author of Acts dreamed, the appeal of the man of Macedonia ultimately brought Christianity to ends of the earth that in the 1st century were not even known to exist.<sup>75</sup>

*The evangelizing at Philippi (16:11–40)* shows us some of the best and the worst of a mission among Gentiles. The generous openness and support of Lydia,<sup>76</sup> a Gentile devotee of Jewish worship, is a model for the Christian household. On the other hand, the legal and financial problems presented by the girl who had a spirit of divination remind us that Paul was dealing with an alien, superstitious world. As the account continues, the miraculous opening of the prison echoes scenes of Peter’s miraculous release from prison and shows that God is with his emissary to the Gentiles. The complexity of Paul’s trial because he is a Roman citizen illustrates how the early Christians, in order to survive, had to use every available means, including Roman law. The “we” form of narrative ceases as Paul leaves Philippi, and so it is possible that the anonymous companion stayed there seven years till Paul came back to Philippi (20:6; AD 51–58).

*At Thessalonica (17:1–9)* Paul runs into the same kind of Jewish opposition that marred his mission in Asia Minor before the Jerusalem conference. The list of charges against Paul and his supporters in 17:6–7 resembles the list of charges against Jesus before Pilate in Luke 23:2—a list found only in Luke. We shall see other resemblances between the treatment of Jesus and

<sup>75</sup>Some on other continents who were evangelized from Europe complain that they were indoctrinated with an alien culture. Yet Europeanization would probably have happened in any case; and the fact that the cross of Christ was planted alongside the banner of the respective king was potentially a helpful corrective—both to abuses that existed before Europeans came (that are sometimes forgotten) and to the abuses they brought.

<sup>76</sup>Compare the support of the Galilean women for Jesus in Luke 8:3. See D. L. Matson, *Household Conversion Narratives in Acts* (JSNTSup 123; Sheffield: Academic, 1996).



the treatment of Paul, a parallelism that fitted the theology of Luke-Acts. Forced by Jewish opposition *Paul goes on to Beroea* (17:10–14), where in an interesting gesture of evenhandedness the author tells us that the Jews were nobler and less contentious.

Yet the Jews from Thessalonica follow, and so *Paul pushes on to Athens* (17:15–34). Just as the author of Acts exhibited a sense of destiny when Paul crossed to Europe, he shows an appreciation of what Athens meant to Greek culture in recounting Paul's stay there. He supplies a dramatic context of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (17:18)<sup>77</sup> who try to fit this new teaching into their categories. The author knows about the agora or public square (17:17) and the hill of the Areopagus (17:19); he phrases the sermon delivered there in quality Greek and has it show an awareness of the many temples and statues of the city. The play on the altar to an unknown god and the philosophical and poetic quotations offer a cultured approach to the message about Christ, quite unlike the gambits of the other sermons in Acts. The master-touch in the scene may be the reaction to this eloquence from the cosmopolitan audience: Some mock; others put Paul off; some believe.<sup>78</sup> Paul will go from here directly to Corinth, and in I Cor 2:1–2 he describes what may have been a lesson learned: "When I came to you proclaiming the mystery of God, I did not come with lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."

*Paul's stay at Corinth* (18:1–18) has an added interest: From there Paul writes I Thess, our oldest preserved Christian writing; and he would direct much later correspondence to Corinth, causing us to know more about that Pauline church than any other. Aquila and Priscilla (Prisca), whom he meets there, will feature later in Paul's correspondence and career. (Acts consistently uses the name Priscilla; Paul consistently uses Prisca.) They had come from Rome (probably already as Christians) and will eventually go back and be part of Paul's contacts ("co-workers in Christ Jesus") with Rome before he ever arrives there (Rom 16:3). We can see Paul forming a circle of colleagues and friends who would be in contact with him all his life (Chapter

<sup>77</sup>B. Gärtner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation* (Uppsala Univ., 1955).

<sup>78</sup>A moment's reflection on three major cities is worthwhile. Athens was the center of culture, philosophy, and art; Paul's message had only limited success there, and we are told of no other early mission to that city. Alexandria was the center of learning with its magnificent library tradition; the eloquent preacher Apollos came from there (Acts 18:24), but otherwise (and despite later legends) we know of no pre-70 Christian missionary activity there. Rome was the seat of imperial power and ruled the world. There was a successful Christian mission in the capital by the 40s; Paul could address plural house churches there before 60; various NT writings are thought to have been addressed to or sent by the church of Rome; and ultimately Peter and Paul would die there. Why greater attention to Rome? Evidently early Christians were realists: Neither Athens the museum nor Alexandria the library could sway the world, and so the powerful city that did was a more fruitful target.

17 C below). The reference to tentmaking at the beginning of Paul's stay at Corinth reminds us of the indication in his letters that he normally supported himself and did not ask his hearers for personal financial help (also Acts 20:33–35). Once again we see Jewish hostility, so that Paul is brought before the tribunal of the Roman proconsul Gallio—a figure whose presence at Corinth supplies a most important key for dating Paul's mission there to AD 51–52 (p. 433 below). The unwillingness of the Roman official to get involved in Jewish religious questions is part of the general picture of the pre-Nero period when Rome was not yet hostile to Christians as such. The *return from Corinth to Antioch* (18:19–22) is compacted into a brief (and somewhat confusing) account, as Paul passes through Ephesus, Caesarea, and Jerusalem (the “church” of 18:22?) en route.

**2. From Antioch to Ephesus and Greece, and Return to Caesarea (18:23–21:14).** After a while *Paul sets out from Antioch through Galatia and Phrygia* (18:23). While Paul is en route, we are told of *the presence at Ephesus of Apollos from Alexandria* (18:24–28) and then at the beginning of *Paul's stay at Ephesus* (19:1–40[41]) of others, who believed in Jesus but had received only the baptism of John and knew nothing of the Holy Spirit. Little enlightenment is given about how such a situation could exist—were these evangelized by some who knew Jesus during the ministry but left Palestine before the crucifixion and resurrection?

Paul remains at Ephesus about three years.<sup>79</sup> Acts 19:11–19 piques our interest with portraits of Paul the miracle worker and of Jewish exorcists attempting to drive out evil spirits using the name of Jesus (cf. Luke 9:49–50). A struggle among those who appealed to Jesus plays large in much of the Pauline correspondence written from Ephesus (Gal? Phil? Phlm? I Cor). The refrain that “the word of the Lord grew” (Acts 19:20; cf. 6:7; 12:24) signals that, alongside Jerusalem and Antioch, Christianity now has another major center, Ephesus, and that Paul's ministry has been blessed even as was the ministry of the Twelve. Acts 19:21 is the first indication of Paul's ultimate plan to go to Rome via Greece and Jerusalem, an important anticipation for how the book will end. There is a colorful account of the silversmiths' riot centered on Artemis or Diana of the Ephesians (19:23–40[41]) that terminates Paul's stay.

Briefly recounted are *Paul's travels through Macedonia to Greece* (20:1–3a), i.e., Corinth, where he stays three months. (In this period, AD 57–58, he writes II Cor before he gets to Corinth, and Rom from Corinth.) Then *he*

<sup>79</sup>Three months in 19:8, plus two years in 19:10; plus added time in 19:21ff. = “three years” of 20:31? From here he seems to have written Gal, Phil, Phlm, and I Cor. Some would detect a deliberate change of missionary style—radiating out from a steady base of operations rather than frenetically moving on after a few weeks in each place.

goes back through Macedonia and Philippi (20:3b–6). The “we” form of narrative resumes as Paul crosses from Philippi to Troas where he raises the dead to life (20:7–12), even as Peter raised Tabitha in Joppa (9:36–42). It would be of interest to know if Paul’s breaking bread in 20:11 means that he presided at the eucharist. Hastening on to be at Jerusalem for Pentecost (AD 58), *Paul sails along the Asia Minor coast to Miletus bypassing Ephesus* (20:13–16).

At Miletus he gives *an eloquent farewell sermon to the presbyters of the church of Ephesus* (20:17–38). It has great value as a guide to how the author of Acts sees the presbyters (cf. 14:23 above) who inherit the care of the church from Paul. In the Pastoral Epistles there is information suggesting that (presumably after going to Rome and being released from prison) Paul came back to Asia Minor in the mid 60s. Acts betrays no knowledge of this, so that the sermon constitutes Paul’s final directives to those whom he will never see again (20:25,38).<sup>80</sup> It begins with an *apologia pro vita sua* (20:18–21) as Paul reflects on how he has served the Lord; this yields to foreboding about the imprisonment and afflictions he must now undergo. This man who first encountered the profession of Christ in Jerusalem some twenty years before at the trial and stoning of Stephen is being led by the Spirit to return to that city where he will be put on trial amidst cries for his death (see 22:22). In this portentous context Paul admonishes the presbyters he is leaving behind to be shepherds of the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers.<sup>81</sup> As we can see from I Peter 5:1–4, the comparison of the presbyters to shepherds of the flock was well established in the late 1st century. Although that image reflects authority, the real emphasis is on the obligation to take care of the flock and not let it be ravaged—in short, what we mean by “*pastoral* care,” a terminology derived from shepherding. The most pressing danger to be faced, as also in the Pastoral Epistles, is false teaching: “those who speak perverse things so as to draw away disciples” (Acts 20:30). Paul stresses that he supported himself, coveting no one’s silver and gold (20:33–35), and indeed elsewhere the NT advice to presbyters warns against a corrupting love of money (I Peter 5:2; Titus 1:7; I Timothy 3:3), an enduring temptation since the presbyters managed the common funds.

After this farewell at Miletus, the return journey to Palestine continues, bringing *Paul to Tyre* (Acts 21:1–6) and another dramatic farewell, and then

<sup>80</sup>This portion of Acts resembles the context of the Pastoral Epistles where the time of Paul’s departure has come (II Timothy 4:6–8). In fact both Acts and the Pastorals (in that order) were most likely written after Paul’s death. Many scholars think that, of the existing correspondence, Rom was the last letter actually written by Paul and contains his final preserved thoughts.

<sup>81</sup>20:28: pl. of *episkopos*, literally “one who oversees,” which is the Greek word for bishop. Once more we are close to the atmosphere of the Pastorals where there are groups of presbyter-bishops in the postPauline churches, i.e., presbyters who oversee the community’s life and teaching.

on to Caesarea (21:7–14). There at the home of Philip the Hellenist and his four daughter-prophets, the prophet Agabus comes and by symbolism forewarns Paul of imprisonment. Thus Paul's road to Jerusalem and impending suffering echoes Jesus' journey to Jerusalem where he would be seized and put to death (Luke 9:51; 13:33).

**3. Arrest in Jerusalem; Imprisonment and Trials in Caesarea (Acts 21:15–26:32).** Clearly a climax is reached when *Paul goes up to Jerusalem* (21:15–17), where the “we” form of description comes to an end (21:18), not to be resumed until six chapters and two years later. *Paul is received by James and the elders* (21:18–25) and reports to them his success among the Gentiles. They match his claims with reports of their own successes among the Jews. Acts cannot disguise the negative feelings raised among the Jerusalem Christian authorities by (false) rumors about what Paul has been teaching.<sup>82</sup> The well-intentioned plan to have Paul show his loyalty to Judaism by purifying himself and going to the Temple (21:24) fails when *fanatics start a riot, claiming that he has defiled the holy place* (21:26–30) by bringing Gentiles into it. Paul is saved from the crowd only by *the intervention of a Roman tribune with soldiers* (21:31–40); but after being arrested, Paul protests in Greek that he is a Roman citizen. He is allowed to speak in Aramaic to the crowd.

*Paul's speech of defense* (22:1–21) recounts his conversion and its aftermath with some variants from the original account in 9:1–30, e.g., cf. 9:7 and 22:9. *The speech produces conflict* (22:22–29): The crowd reacts violently, but Paul's Roman citizenship wins him the tribune's protection. The next day *Paul is brought before a Sanhedrin* (22:30–23:11). He arouses dissent between the Sadducees and Pharisees over the resurrection. (There are echoes here of Jesus' appearance before the Sanhedrin as well as his dealing with the Sadducees over the resurrection [Luke 20:27].) Even though the tribune rescues him from the violent melee, a vision of the Lord warns Paul that he will have to testify in Rome. Paul's nephew frustrates the *Jewish plot to kill Paul* (Acts 23:12–22), and *Paul is sent to Caesarea and the Roman prefect Felix* (23:23–35). The *trial of Paul before Felix* (24:1–27), who was procurator in Palestine between 52 and 60, has parallelism to the trial of Jesus before Pilate. The high priest and the Jewish elders present Felix with a list of charges (24:5–6) resembling those presented by the Sanhedrin of the chief priests and elders against Jesus (Luke 23:1–2). The self-understanding of Paul in Acts 24:14 is noteworthy: “I admit to you that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers;

<sup>82</sup>We have no evidence that he taught “all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to forsake Moses” (21:21).

I believe everything conformable to the Law and written down in the prophets.”<sup>83</sup> Interestingly we are told that Felix knew about the Way (24:22). Paul says that he brought alms to Jerusalem (24:17), indirectly confirming the many references in his letters to a collection for Jerusalem (especially Rom 15:25–28). Felix hopes for a bribe—Josephus confirms his venality—and Paul is left in prison<sup>84</sup> at Caesarea for two years (AD 58–60) until the end of Felix’s procuracy.

*Paul is interrogated by Festus (25:1–12)*, the next procurator who ruled in AD 60–62; but the prisoner refuses an offer to be tried in Jerusalem and appeals to Caesar. The author’s sense of drama is caught in the lapidary Roman response (25:12): “You have appealed to Caesar; to Caesar you shall go.” The parallelism to the Lucan trial of Jesus is heightened, because *Festus passes Paul to the Herodian king Agrippa II (25:13–26:32)* to be heard,<sup>85</sup> even as Pilate sent Jesus to Herod (Luke 23:7). Again the Herodian king finds the prisoner not guilty. For a third time Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus is recounted (Acts 26:9–20).

**4. Journey to Rome as a Prisoner (27:1–28:14a).** Once more employing the “we” format, Acts now recounts a long sea journey up the Syrian coast, over past Cyprus, along the southern coast of Asia Minor, across to the southern coast of Crete, and then amidst a great storm, to Malta, Sicily, and up the west coast of Italy, to a landing at Puteoli, near Naples. This journey probably began in the late summer of 60 and ended in 61. Survival from storm and snakebite illustrates God’s care for Paul whose concern for companions on the ship and healings effected at Malta show that his missionary sense has not left him. Vivid details about the navigation and the various ships lend verisimilitude, although some scholars skeptically reject the whole as unhistorical.

**5. Paul at Rome (28:14b–31).** Paul’s arrival after his long and treacherous sea journey is described in a portentous understatement, “And so we came to Rome” (28:14b). This is the ultimate step foreseen by the risen Jesus in 1:8: “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria, and *to the end of the earth.*” By this time in the early 60s, Christian communities had been at Rome for about twenty years. But in the flow of the story that has centered on Peter and Paul, a climax comes with the arrival in the capital of the great missionary. Ironically Roman authorities have sent him there because of his appeal to the emperor and thus become responsible for the

<sup>83</sup>For the Way, see n. 21 above. Josephus lists three sects of the Jews (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes), and by the time Acts was written Christians may have been categorized as a sect.

<sup>84</sup>B. Rapske in TBAFC 3 (1994) gives an exhaustive treatment of how Paul would have been treated in Roman custody.

<sup>85</sup>R. F. O’Toole, *Acts 26* (AnBib 78; Rome: PBI, 1978).



evangelizing of their own Empire. To the very end Acts shows Paul appealing to the local Jews with the insistence that he has done nothing “against the customs of our fathers.” Acts 28:21 is important: The author portrays the Jewish community in Jerusalem as being in close contact with the Jewish community in Rome (which may well be factual).<sup>86</sup> Paul’s preaching about Jesus has no success; and the last words attributed to him in the book, despairing of a hearing from the Jews, firmly turn to the Gentiles who will listen.<sup>87</sup> The summary that ends Acts speaks of Paul’s preaching for two years in Rome with success.

## Sources and Compositional Features

Under this heading we shall consider the various elements that make up Acts: (a) Traditions and/or Sources; (b) Speeches; (c) Summaries.

(a) TRADITIONS AND/OR SOURCES. In Chapter 9 under *Sources* we saw that the Lucan evangelist not only acknowledged the fonts from whom tradition about Jesus came (“the original eyewitnesses and ministers of the word”) but also used with reasonable fidelity written sources (Mark, Q). Some would contend that the author did not have similar controls in Acts and was much more creative and therefore fictional. Part of their argumentation is that, while stories about Jesus might be preserved, Christians would not be interested enough in the apostles or churches to preserve *early* stories about them that had a chance of being genuinely historical. (They allow that the author may have used the later traditions of the church of his own time filled with legendary accretions; see Haenchen, *Acts* 81–89.) Actually there is reasonable evidence in the uncontested Pauline writings to the contrary.<sup>88</sup> Moreover since the author indicates a consistency by dedicating both volumes of Luke-Acts to Theophilus, there is no reason to think that the tracing of everything carefully from the beginning promised by Luke 1:3 stopped with the Gospel. Accordingly the following questions are worth pursuing: What fonts did the evangelist have for traditions he included and developed in Acts? Did he have written or, at least, already shaped sources for Acts?

<sup>86</sup>That the Jews in Rome have heard nothing hostile about Paul is odd, since in writing to the Romans Paul seems to expect that when he comes he will find hostility from Christians who are particularly attached to Judaism. See BMAR 111–22.

<sup>87</sup>A number of scholars think that the author expected an ongoing mission to the Jews. True, there is no reason to think that preaching to Jews would be discontinued, but the climactic final judgment attributed to Paul does not prognosticate success.

<sup>88</sup>As J. Jervell and others have pointed out, what happened in one church was reported to other churches (I Thess 1:8–9; II Cor 3:2–3; Rom 1:8). Also there are references to the apostles and known church figures (I Cor 9:5; 15:5–7), to the church in Jerusalem and Judea (I Thess 2:14; Gal 2), and to the customs of all the churches (I Cor 14:33–34). Such references presume that audiences already know something about these figures and communities.

In discussing the Gospel of Luke, we saw that the fonts for some peculiar Lucan material (L) may have been people who appear in Acts, e.g., the Herod Antipas tradition from Manaen in Acts 13:1. On the assumption that the author was the companion of Paul in the “we” passages of Acts (see *Authorship* below), the report that in 21:8–10 “we entered the house of Philip the evangelist” and that Agabus came there has suggested that from one or both of these individuals came the stories about Philip and the Hellenists and Agabus in Acts 6:5; 8:5–40; 11:27–28. If the tradition is accurate that the author was Luke from Antioch, did he have contact there with Barnabas, who told him about Paul’s “First Missionary Journey” made with Barnabas and Mark (Barnabas’s cousin: Col 4:10)?<sup>89</sup>

Besides personal fonts of information, fixed sources have been proposed. Two factors have contributed to the various suggestions. (1) The diverse contents of Acts cover in chronological sequence (but with some overlapping) the activities of three different agents in three geographical areas, namely, the *apostles* in Jerusalem; the *Hellenists* who were eventually driven out of Jerusalem and had a role in developing the church in Antioch; and finally *Paul* whose missions beginning from Antioch go west to “the end of the earth.” (2) Doublets (e.g., chaps. 4 and 5) have been detected in the first half of Acts and explained as the product of the interweaving of two sources. Accordingly a typical proposal<sup>90</sup> detects the following sources (with the first two interwoven):

Jerusalem (Caesarea, Palestine) Source: 1:6–2:40; 3:1–4:31; 4:36–5:11; 5:17–42; 8:5–40; 9:32–11:18; 12:1–23.

Antioch (Hellenist) Source: 6:1–6; 6:8–8:4; 11:19–30; 15:3–33.

Pauline Source: 9:1–30; 13:3–14:28; 15:35–28:31, including “we” passages (n. 98 below).

There is little evidence that the author of Acts was present for much of what he narrates (except the “we” passages), and little likelihood that he invented all of it; and so he must have had at his disposal information or traditions. But had such traditions already been shaped into sequential sources? The argument from style enters the discussion but scarcely resolves the problem. Some detect a strongly Semitic style in the first half of Acts and use this

<sup>89</sup>See R. Glover, NTS 11 (1964–65), 97–106. The author was at Troas when the “we” passages begin (Acts 16:11), but it is not impossible that he had come there from Antioch.

<sup>90</sup>My description draws on Fitzmyer, JBC 45.6. For a thorough survey see Dupont, *Sources*. Probably the most widely proposed is an Antioch source. In the complicated textual theory of the French scholars Boismard and Lamouille (n. 110 below) the now-lost original edition of Acts drew on a highly historical source, composed in Palestine ca. 50, in which *Peter* was the main figure. Then from earlier material the author of that edition (a Jewish Christian) composed the travels of *Paul*.

as a proof for a Jerusalem source.<sup>91</sup> Yet stylistic arguments are not overly convincing, for this author is capable of archaizing when he is describing a story that has a decidedly Jewish setting<sup>92</sup>—in this instance Palestine as contrasted with the Gentile areas to the west that will frame the narrative to follow. Moreover, other scholars find marks of Lucan style and vocabulary in the various sections of Acts, so that whether the author used loose traditions or fixed sources, he would have rewritten the material he took over. By way of summary this observation may be made: *Nothing like the wide agreement on the Gospel's use of the sources Mark and Q exists for Acts' use of sources.* Whether Acts drew on traditions or sources, a fundamental issue remains: What is the historical value of the final account? That will be discussed below under “*Luke*” the *Historian*.

(b) **SPEECHES.** Roughly one third of Acts consists of speeches, made principally by Peter, Stephen, Paul, and James.<sup>93</sup> Instead of describing in the third person the significance of something that is happening, Acts prefers to offer a speech where one of the main characters explains that significance. Why does Acts adopt this technique? Some regard it simply as a Hellenistic literary device to make the narrative more interesting and vivid. More precisely it has been regarded as a device of ancient historiographers who composed speeches that could serve as appropriate commentaries and put them on the lips of famous men. Thucydides, *History* 1.22.1, says that, although he kept as close as possible to the general sense of the words that were said, he had the speakers say what was in his view called for by the situation.<sup>94</sup> Does that point to a possible combination of a memory of what was said and of the historian's own interpretative imagination? In the case of Acts, once more we must recognize that (if we can judge from the limits of the “we” passages) the author of Acts himself was not present when many of these speeches were supposed to have been made.

More conservative interpreters have suggested that important speeches would have been memorized by the speaker's disciples who *were* present, so

<sup>91</sup>Drawing on syntactical evidence, R. A. Martin, NTS 11 (1964–65), 38–59, argues for Aramaic sources in Acts 1–15.

<sup>92</sup>See, for example, the Semitized style of the infancy narratives because the figures there are the first Jews to encounter Jesus.

<sup>93</sup>The number of speeches is counted between twenty-four and twenty-eight. They have been studied in the past by such distinguished scholars as Cadbury, *Making* 184–93 and Dibelius, *Studies* 138–85; and an excellent summary and reexamination are presented by M. L. Soards, *The Speeches in Acts* (Louisville: W/K, 1994).

<sup>94</sup>Lucian of Samosata, *How To Write History* 58: “If some one has to be brought in to give a speech, above all let his language suit his person and his subject . . . It is then, however, that you can exercise your rhetoric and show your eloquence.” Most moderns would regard this process as not truly historical, but evidently Lucian thought it was reconcilable with what he wrote earlier (*How* 39): “The sole task of the historian is to tell it just as it happened.”

that we could have substantially what was said. Others think that there was no real memory so that the speeches are virtually pure Lucan creation. Still others opt for different approaches to different speeches in Acts. For instance, Paul’s speeches that are custom-designed for an occasion<sup>95</sup> might have been free compositions by the author of Acts interpreting the mind of the great missionary. On the other hand, the somewhat stereotyped kerygmatic speeches of Peter (2:14–36; 3:12–26; 4:8–12; 5:29–32; 10:34–43), and of Paul (13:16–41), who speaks in the same way that Peter does, may have been shaped in Acts from memories of an early apostolic preaching style. As we saw, Stephen’s speech is almost unique in outlook and emphases, and some have used this as proof that Acts must have drawn on tradition even in the nonkerygmatic discourses. Whatever the derivation of the material in the speeches, no appeal to purely literary and historiographic conventions does sufficient justice to how the speeches serve to develop the theological thrust of Acts. The progress of Christian insight into God’s plan of history finds expression in them, and on that I concentrated in the *General Analysis* above.

(c) SUMMARIES. In the Gospel Luke used and developed some of Mark’s summaries as well as adding his own. The account of activities at Jerusalem in Acts uses summaries (2:42–47; 4:32–35; 5:11–16; 6:7) in order to portray the growth and sanctity of the community in its golden age, and mark off steps in the development of the action. Later in the book the latter function is served by one-sentence summaries (9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30–31). This effort for transitions enhances the readability of Acts as a smooth-flowing narrative. Some of the summaries involve the author’s knowledge of the early Jerusalem Christians. Let us now consider how accurate such knowledge was.

## “Luke” the Historian

Our brief analysis of compositional features has pointed to the abilities of the author as theologian and narrator, but left open the very disputed question of his role as historian. Since he starts his two-volume work by talking about an orderly account based on a word passed down from original eyewitnesses, and about tracing everything from the beginning and writing systematically (Luke 1:1–3), by any standard the question of history is appropriate. Yet, no matter what he learned from others about Jesus, how much did the

<sup>95</sup>Acts 17:22–31: on the Areopagus; 20:18–35: at Miletus; 22:3–21: at Jerusalem; 24:10–21: before Felix; 26:1–23: before King Agrippa; and 28:17–20, 25–29: to the Jews of Rome.

author know about the early Jerusalem church, about the spread of Christianity, and about Paul? Estimates of his knowledge are reflected in evaluations of Acts ranging from almost purely fictive to remarkably accurate.<sup>96</sup>

Before entering the details of the discussion, all should recognize and admit that Acts' reports are highly selective chronologically and geographically. A reasonable estimate is that a three-year span is covered between chaps. 1 and 8, and almost twenty-five years between chaps. 9 and 28. The incidents narrated in that span of time are few indeed. In concentrating on the Jerusalem Christians and the transition to Antioch, Acts does not tell us when and how the followers of Jesus spread to Damascus (9:2). The author has information about Paul's travels to the west; but he reports nothing about the spread of Christian missionaries to eastern Syria or North Africa, or the initial evangelizing of Rome itself (yet see n. 12 above). Thus even if everything he reports should emerge as accurate historically, it would be a sketchy account.

How much did the author of Acts know about the early Jerusalem and Antioch churches? Since there is no other detailed source for this period, there is much that we can never verify, e.g., about the harassment of Peter and John by the priestly authorities, the existence and martyrdom of Stephen, and the killing of James, son of Zebedee, by Herod Agrippa. (It would, however, take a dedicated skeptic to assume that all such events are fictional.) Two elements that can contribute to an intelligent evaluation of historicity are the determination of *plausibility* through what we know from elsewhere of the Jewish and Christian scenes, and the detection of *provable errors* in what is affirmed. As for judging plausibility we must make allowance for the author's desire to confirm the faith of Theophilus. There is no doubt, for instance, that he romanticizes the early Christian picture at Jerusalem in terms of the rapidity and numbers of conversions, the saintliness of the life, the generosity in giving up possessions, and the single-mindedness. Implicitly he admits this simplification when by way of exception he tells us the stories of the deceptive Ananias and Sapphira, and of the division between the Hebrews and the Hellenists. If one allows for such romanticization and simplification, however, the picture of the values, actions, and organization of an early apocalyptically minded Jewish Christian community is quite plausible when tested by comparable elements in the Dead Sea Scrolls com-

<sup>96</sup>Gasque. *History*, is a good survey. Opposite poles in the earlier critical approach to Acts were represented by F. C. Baur (who saw Acts as a 2d-century compromise between the Gentile followers of Paul and the Judaizing followers of Peter) and W. M. Ramsay (who presented his geographical and archaeological studies of Asia Minor as confirming the historicity of Acts). In the early 1900s strong arguments for historicity were advanced by the liberal church historian, A. (von) Harnack (*Luke*), and by the German classical historian, E. Meyer.



munity. In terms of NT parallels, the importance given to Peter and John among the Twelve receives confirmation from Gal 2:9, even as Peter as the chief missionary evangelist among the Twelve is confirmed by Gal 2:7; I Cor 9:5. As we saw, many scholars analyze the dispute between the Hebrews and the Hellenists in Acts 6 in terms of adherence to the Temple. If so, the Acts picture that it was not the Twelve who evangelized Samaria, but those who had no loyalty to the Jerusalem Temple, may find some confirmation in John 4:23,37–38.

As for provable errors, the most obvious ones are in Palestinian history rather than in Christian history. Whether or not, perhaps for antiSadducee reasons, Gamaliel the elder advocated some tolerance toward the early followers of Jesus (Acts 5:34–39) we cannot know, but his speech is probably for the most part a Lucan creation. Luke 2:2, combined with 1:5, is inaccurate about the date of the census of Quirinius; and there is a similar inaccuracy in Acts 5:37 about the revolt of Judas the Galilean directed against that census (n. 33 above). By the time Acts was written, the Roman cohort Italica was in Syria and could be used when needed in Caesarea; it is not impossible that 10:1 is anachronistic in positing its presence there *ca.* 39. But such minor inaccuracies do not mean that we can dismiss the general historicity of Acts' portrayal of early Christianity, any more than inaccuracies in Josephus and the discrepancies between his *Ant.* and *War* entitle us to dismiss his general historicity.

How much did the author of Acts know about Paul's missionary travels? A large part of this discussion will take place under the subheading *Authorship* below in terms of whether the author could have been a companion of Paul for a limited period of time covered by the "we" passages. (There the author's portrait of Paul's relationship to Jerusalem and his knowledge of Pauline theology will be compared to Paul's self-expression in the letters.) Here we are interested in the facts of Paul's journeys. Long ago the British scholars J. B. Lightfoot and W. M. Ramsay pointed to the extraordinary accuracy of Acts' knowledge of the widely differing titles of municipal and imperial officials in the various towns visited (e.g., 13:12; 17:6; 18:12; 19:31,35)—an accuracy often proved by datable inscriptions discovered in the respective sites. Overall the book is also accurate about the boundaries and alignments of districts and provinces in the 50s. These observations are a major factor in challenging the thesis that Acts was fiction written in the mid-2d century, for by that late date even a meticulous researcher would have been hard put to be accurate about such details. Also much of what Acts tells us correlates very well with what we can determine from Paul's own letters (Table 5 in Chapter 16 below).

Given that he was not an eyewitness of what he narrates and that he is

highly selective, the author of Acts does not get bad grades for historical accuracy in the various sections of his book. Though he wrote more in a biblical style than in a classical history style, it is not ridiculous to think that the author might have been a fitting candidate for membership in the brotherhood of Hellenistic historians, even if he would never be made president of the society. Yet in evaluating Luke the historian it is worth remembering that this author who never called his Gospel a gospel never calls his Acts a history. He thought of both as *diēgēsis*, “narrative.”<sup>97</sup> In Acts the narrative he recounts is primarily intended to give believers assurance (Luke 1:4) and strengthen them with theological insight. Therefore, whatever history Acts preserves is put to the service of theology and pastoral preaching.

## Authorship

In the subsection on *Authorship* in Chapter 9 above we saw the reasonable possibility that the Lucan evangelist was a Gentile (a Syrian from Antioch?) who was converted or attracted to Judaism some years before he was evangelized by Christian preachers. From Acts the detail that he was a companion of Paul has been added both by early church tradition and internal analysis. This is all related to several interconnected assumptions: The “we” passages<sup>98</sup> are historical; only two people were covered by that “we” (Paul and an unnamed companion); and the author of Acts was the “we” companion. Let us look at these assumptions.

There is no major reason to doubt that the “we” passages are historical in the general sense that Paul made the journeys involved. But was there a specific companion who accompanied him (and therefore knew details), or is “we” simply a literary convention in shipboard journeys? In an oft-cited article V. K. Robbins<sup>99</sup> offered examples of “we” used in such sea travels in contemporary Greco-Roman literature. However, Fitzmyer has examined the examples and found them wanting;<sup>100</sup> and it is far from clear that they explain satisfactorily the usage of Acts. If “we” is purely conventional, why does

<sup>97</sup>Fitzmyer, *Luke* 1.17. Pervo, *Profit*, stressing that Acts presents an edifying message in entertaining garb, would argue that the proper classification of Acts among ancient writings would be the popular novel. That is a good classification for some of the apocryphal *Acts*, but does it do justice to the solid historical content of canonical Acts? In the classification of modern literature some “historical novels” contain highly reliable facts woven together on a simplified storyline.

<sup>98</sup>They are 16:10–17 (“Second Missionary Journey,” from Troas to Philippi); 20:5–15; 21:1–18 (end of the “Third Missionary Journey,” from Philippi to Jerusalem); 27:1–28:16 (Paul sent as a prisoner from Caesarea to Rome).

<sup>99</sup>BR 20 (1975), 5–18; reprinted in Talbert, *Perspectives* 215–42.

<sup>100</sup>*Luke Theologian* 16–22. For instance, some are in the first person singular, not plural, and therefore simply autobiographical; in many parts of the narrative, not simply in journeys, some use a “we” that is only slightly different from an editorial “we.”

this pronominal usage not appear throughout all the sea-journeying in Acts instead of in only a few sections separated by years in the narrative? Moreover, in the first “we” passage (Acts 16:10–17), Paul is on land at Philippi in all but two verses. (See also 20:7–12; 21:15–18 within the second and third “we” passages.) Finally, one could argue that “we” in Acts should be related to the “us” of Luke 1:1–2, which has nothing to do with a sea voyage.

A simpler explanation regards the “we” as autobiographical, so that the “we” passages constitute a type of diary describing moments when the writer was with Paul. Normally, then, it would follow that the writer of the diary was the author of the whole Book of Acts, especially since the general style and interests of the “we” passages are those found elsewhere in the book. Nevertheless, scholars who cannot reconcile the picture of Paul in Acts with the “real” Paul revealed by his own letters have proposed that the author got the diary of a true companion of Paul and included sections of it at appropriate moments in the narrative he built around them. Before resorting to such a cumbersome solution we need to examine how irreconcilable Acts and the Pauline letters really are.

Acts gives information about *Paul’s early life*. He was from Tarsus and his name was Saul. He was reared and studied in Jerusalem and seemingly did not come there alone, for in 23:16 we find the son of Paul’s sister at Jerusalem. Acts recounts that after Paul’s conversion he went back to Tarsus (9:30) only to come later to Antioch (11:25–26), but tells us nothing of Paul’s life or activities there. Most of this goes beyond information in Paul’s letters without contradicting it, although Paul’s upbringing in Jerusalem rather than in Tarsus is disputed (Chapter 16 below).

The real challenge to the author’s being identified as the “we” companion relates to his knowledge of *Paul’s theology and career as a missionary for Christ*. In the preceding subsection on “*Luke*” the historian, we saw that Acts fared reasonably well in the context of ancient historiography. Nevertheless, on the grounds that a true companion would have been very accurate, discrepancies that can be detected between Acts and the Pauline letters are emphasized by those who would challenge the author’s identity. In such challenges sometimes a discrepancy is unwarrantedly magnified into a contradiction. For instance, Conzelmann (*Acts* xlv) misstates the evidence: “Luke denies the apostolic title even to Paul.” Acts 14:14 speaks of “the apostles Barnabas and Paul.” That reference (also 14:4) is often dismissed on the (unprovable) grounds that here Acts means apostles of the church of Antioch, somehow a lesser title. (Would the readers be led by the narrative of Acts to suspect that?) But even were that so, Conzelmann’s “denies” is inappropriate, for the evidence shows only that in the usage of Luke-Acts “apostles” normally means the Twelve (which was probably the common usage in

the last part of the 1st century, e.g., Matt 10:2; Rev 21:14). There is no sign that this is a conscious rejection of Paul's own usage—it is scarcely a denigration of Paul, who is the exalted hero of the whole second half of Acts.

Nevertheless, when we leave aside exaggerations, there are still significant discrepancies. Major examples involve Acts' account of Paul's return to Jerusalem after his conversion *ca.* AD 36, and Paul's acceptance of the food purity rules after the Jerusalem meeting of 49 (see pp. 298, 308–9 above). Also the author of Acts betrays no knowledge of the Pauline letters<sup>101</sup> and is silent about many of the principal theological themes stressed in those letters. In a famous article, P. Vielhauer<sup>102</sup> argued that Luke-Acts' natural theology, view of obedience to the Mosaic Law, christology (no preexistent or cosmic Christ), and eschatology (not imminent) are different from Paul's. However, others disagree and find no contradictions.<sup>103</sup> At least one should not overlook similarities. The eucharistic formula in Luke 22:19–20 is very close to that in I Cor 11:23–25. That the first appearance of the risen Lord was to Simon Peter is suggested by Luke 24:34 and I Cor 15:5. The picture of Paul in Acts as one who performs miracles is confirmed by II Cor 12:12; Rom 12:18–19. As for differences, even if in general Acts does not emphasize the theme of justification and prefers forgiveness of sins, 13:38–39 speaks of both and maintains that justification comes by belief in Christ rather than by observance of the Law (see also 15:8–9). The basic christology of Jesus as God's Son as phrased in Acts 13:33 is not far from Rom 1:3–4. The natural theology of being able to recognize God from creation is shared by Acts 17:24–30 and Rom 1:19–21; 2:15. Acts certainly puts emphasis on Christ's continuity with the salvation-history of Israel that is hard to reconcile with Paul's radical, apocalyptic understanding of the newness of Christ as expressed in Gal,<sup>104</sup> but not irreconcilable with the picture in Rom 9–11.

Fitzmyer, who thinks Acts was probably written by Luke, points out that

<sup>101</sup>Although this is widely held, see Walker "Acts"; also M. D. Goulder, PRS 13 (1986), 97–112, who argues that Luke knew I Cor and I Thess.

<sup>102</sup>"On the Paulinism of Acts," SLA 33–50 (German orig. 1950–51). Much of his argument uses as a standard of judgment the theology of Gal, Rom, and I–II Cor. K. P. Donfried, TTC 3–26, maintains that the theology of Acts' Paul is quite close to that reflected in I Thess—a Paul still influenced by what he learned at Antioch in Syria and before his stance on justification was sharpened by the later polemic (Gal) against Jewish Christian missionaries who insisted on circumcision and justification through observance of the works of the Mosaic Law.

<sup>103</sup>Gärtner, *areopagus*; P. Borgen, CBQ 31 (1969), 169–82. Mattill, *Luke*, denies that the author believed that the end was imminent. A large group of scholars would contend that the emphasis in Acts 1:7 points to a theologian who maintained that one does not know when the end will come—an outlook that is reconcilable with alternating between hoping that it will come soon and thinking that it may be delayed. Also see *Issue4* in Chapter 9 above.

<sup>104</sup>Fitzmyer, *Luke* 1.21, may be too optimistic: "By casting the primitive Christian message in terms of salvation-history rather than as apocalyptic Luke has again merely played the message in a different key."

the “we” companion was with Paul only at certain times.<sup>105</sup> The “we” references begin at Troas on the “Second Missionary Journey” *ca.* 50; therefore the “we” companion might have had only imprecise knowledge of earlier events. The first “we” passage breaks off after the companion and Paul have gone from Troas to Philippi, and the next picks up when Paul sails from Philippi (20:5) on his way back to Palestine in 58. We are left to surmise that the “we” companion stayed in Philippi for the whole of the intervening period of some seven years (while Paul travelled to Corinth, back to Palestine and Antioch, came to Ephesus and stayed there for a long time, and went to Corinth again). If he did, he was not with Paul during the sending of I Thess, Gal, Phil, Phlm, I-II Cor, and Rom (as dated by the more plausible reckoning—Table 6 in Chapter 16 below). That could explain why if the companion wrote Acts, he shows no knowledge of the letters or of the theology in them shaped by the situations Paul encountered.

There is much to be said for that argument; but as Fitzmyer recognizes, there remain problems. The *first problem* is with Paul’s letter to the Philippians written when he was in prison—should not the “we” companion have known of that letter? There are three proposals for dating the writing: from *Ephesus* in 54–56, from *Caesarea* in Palestine in 58–60, and from *Rome* in 61–63. The “we” companion was with Paul in Palestine in 58–60 (but was he at Caesarea or did he stay in Jerusalem?); he went with Paul to Rome in 60–61 (but since the “we” passage ends in Acts 28:16, did he stay with Paul there for the two years described in 28:30?). Actually the best option may be that Phil was written from Ephesus in 54–56 (Chapter 20 below); but then, if the “we” companion was at Philippi from 50 to 58, he would have been there when the letter arrived. If he is Luke, why is he not mentioned in the letter?<sup>106</sup> On the other hand, of all the Pauline communities, the Philippians are the most caring for Paul’s welfare, never forgetting to send him help in his activities (Phil 4:14–18) and imprisonment. Was that because one who had come there as a companion of Paul remained at Philippi, guiding that community and making certain that it did not forget the apostle who evangelized it? Could he be the “true yokemate/companion” of Phil 4:3?

The *second problem* revolves around the proposal that because the “we” companion was not with Paul between 50 and 58, he might not have known or at least been affected by the theology of the great debates reflected in the letters of that period. Yet the “we” companion traveled with Paul on long

<sup>105</sup>In this he contradicts what he regards as an exaggeration in Irenaeus, AH 3.14.1: “Luke was inseparable from Paul.”

<sup>106</sup>Yet among the Philippian contacts only Epaphroditus, who had brought gifts to Paul, the two bickering women, Euodia and Syntyche, and Clement are mentioned by name in Phil, so that we are not dealing with a letter that gives an exhaustive list.



journeys after 58 and surely should have learned from him about the controversies and the theology developed in response. That objection loses some of its force, however, if Acts was written several decades after Paul's death when his struggles with Judaizers would have been a distant memory and no longer very relevant to the current scene. When Acts is evaluated, some differences from Paul's letters may stem, not from the author's ignorance of Paul's mind, but from his stressing what he deems more appropriate for another generation. Could he, for instance, have known about Paul's difficulties with the Corinthian Christians (reflected in four or more letters and a reprimanding visit) but have chosen to remain silent so as not to scandalize his readers? Or again, if he was familiar with Paul's confidence that all Israel would be saved by coming to Christ (expressed in Rom 11:25–26 in AD 57/58), now twenty-five years later he may have felt that such optimism was no longer justified (Acts 28:25–28). Was it dishonest for Acts to adapt Paul to the later situation by putting a different outlook on his lips? That question assumes that Paul had only one view on the issue—an assumption rendered suspect by the variety of positions attested in the undisputed letters. Was Paul always optimistic about the future of evangelism among the Jews, or rather was not Rom fine-tuned to a community that had loyalty to Judaism? May not the author of Acts have been stressing a more pessimistic vein of Pauline thought (perhaps a minor one) with which he agreed? One may surmise that ancient writers would often have been astounded by what modern analysts see as contradictions.

In summary, it is *not impossible* that a minor figure who had traveled with Paul for small parts of his ministry wrote Acts decades after the apostle was dead, if one makes the allowance that there were details about Paul's early life he did not know, that he simplified and reordered information (even as he did in the Gospel what he took over material from Mark), and that as a true theologian he rethought some of Paul's emphases that were no longer apropos. We have no way of being certain that he was Luke, as affirmed by 2d-century tradition; but there is no serious reason to propose a different candidate. Luke is mentioned only once in the nondisputed letters of Paul (Phlm 24) and twice in the deuteropaulines (Col 4:14; II Tim 4:11), and so he was scarcely the most obvious Pauline character upon whom to fasten as a fictional author.<sup>107</sup> There is nothing to contradict's Luke's having been with Paul in the places and times indicated by the "we" passages, and he fits the profile of a minor figure. This proposal for authorship has more to recom-

<sup>107</sup>Since some of the best known Pauline companions, like Timothy and Titus, were elsewhere during one or the other of the time periods involved, they can be eliminated. Occasionally it has been suggested that Luke was fastened on because Acts ends in Rome, and according to II Tim 4:11, written from Rome, Luke would have been the only companion with Paul there.

mend it than other theories, but “not impossible” is all that should be claimed.

## Issues and Problems for Reflection

(1) Acts has a textual problem more acute than that of any other NT book. We saw in treating Luke (Chapter 9, *Issue 1*) that the Western family of textual witnesses has a shorter reading in eight or more verses. In Acts, however, Western textual witnesses have a Greek Text of the book one-tenth *longer* than the Egyptian or Alexandrian textual tradition!<sup>108</sup> (Detachment of Acts from Luke may have led to a different textual history.) The extra material includes phrases, clauses, and whole verses; see 13:27; 15:29; 18:27; 19:1; and 28:31 (Fitzmyer, JBC 45.7). From the ms. and patristic evidence alone, one cannot decide which is the older. The majority view treats the Eastern text as more original, and the Western text as paraphrastic, reflecting copyists’ additions of religiously enriching glosses (as in 6:8; 7:55), clarifications (as in 15:34; 16:35–40), and intensified views.<sup>109</sup> Yet there are reasons for dissent: Extra data included in the Western text match the style of the rest of the text, are often neutral, and at times seem to indicate additional accurate knowledge (see 12:10; 19:9; 20:15; and 28:16). To meet the problem most have resorted to a theory of two different editions of Acts (rather than simply tinkering by copyists). Variations of the two-edition theory are (a) Luke did them both, with either the Eastern text as a second, more polished effort, or the Western as a second, expanded effort; (b) A second scribe produced the Western text by glossing the first with notes that Luke left behind; (c) The Western was the original edition, while a shortened edition was produced in the 2d century for wider circulation, or to offer a work of greater polish; (d) An original edition of Acts is no longer preserved; it can be reconstructed from the Western text whose author used it as his principal source; another author produced the Eastern text by revising the Western text in light of the original text to which he had independent access.<sup>110</sup> What-

<sup>108</sup>The latter is most purely represented by Codex Vaticanus, while the most prominent Western witnesses are the Greco-Latin Codex Bezae, a North African Latin version, and a Syriac version (Harclean). Barrett, *Acts* 1.2–29 gives a detailed and balanced discussion of the textual evidence. Most Western readings can be found in the notes to the translation offered in Foakes Jackson, *Beginnings*, vol. 4. It is debated whether there was a single Western text or only Western readings, and whether Irenaeus knew the Western textual tradition *ca.* 180.

<sup>109</sup>E. J. Epp, *The Theological Tendency of Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis in Acts* (SNTSMS 3; Cambridge Univ., 1966), finds an increased antiJewish tendency in the Western text.

<sup>110</sup>This is the thesis of M.-É. Boismard and A. Lamouille, who beginning in 1984 produced a spectacularly detailed multivolumed French study, summarized by J. Taylor “Making.” The author of the Western text is proposed as the one who divided Luke-Acts into two volumes, supplying a preface to each.

ever the solution, most commentaries are based on the shorter, Eastern text.

(2) In terms of God's final establishment of the kingdom (and of the second coming of Jesus), Acts 1:7, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has set by his own authority," has become the answer of the large church: belief that these things will come, but ignorance as to when or how. Often in sharp conflict with this position, apocalypticists put great effort into endtime calculations and predictions. Thus far they have always been wrong about the assigned dates, and so Christians of the larger church tend to look with distaste on futuristic predictions as fanatical. However, strongly apocalyptic Christianity renders a service. If those who profess that they do not know the times and seasons begin to neglect the creedal proposition that Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead, they may start thinking that they can build the kingdom of God. Apocalypticists are very certain that the endtime depends on *God* establishing the kingdom, for human beings on their own usually build only the Tower of Babel. Perhaps Christians need to profess with equal fervor both that they cannot know the times and seasons and that one day, in a way that will probably be a total surprise to all, God will establish the kingdom.

(3) Many sermons or speeches in Acts begin by recounting the OT story before telling the story of Jesus. That pattern may need to be stressed in preaching today.<sup>11</sup> Long centuries after God first called the Hebrew slaves and made them the people of Israel, their self-understanding would be tested as to whether anything had really changed because of that calling, especially when they lost the Promised Land and were carried off into exile. In other words, they lived through beforehand what has often been the Christian experience in the centuries after Jesus. Both Jews and Christians have needed faith in order to see God's realities in and through a long history where at times God seems to be absent. The NT alone covers too short a period of time and is too filled with success to give Christians such lessons. By way of particular example, for centuries the OT (except for verses from the Psalms) was never read in Roman Catholic churches on Sundays, a neglect that left people unfamiliar with what was taught so well there. In the aftermath of Vatican II that defect has been corrected, and yet it is disappointing how seldom the OT readings are the subject of the homily. Preachers turn too easily and quickly to the Gospel readings for their topic, even when the very thing that might most challenge their audience is in the OT passage!

(4) For someone who would eventually be compared, rightly or wrongly,

<sup>11</sup>See "The Preaching Described in Acts and Early Christian Doctrinal Priorities," in my *Biblical Exegesis and Church Doctrine* (New York: Paulist, 1985), 135–46.

to other founders of religions, Jesus was remarkably “unorganizational.” True, he is reported as calling a few people (particularly the Twelve) to leave their work and follow him, but otherwise he seems to have been content to leave without follow-up those who encountered him and were visibly moved by what he did and said. The Gospels tell us with vague generalization that they went back to their towns and villages and reported enthusiastically what they had seen and heard, but there is no evidence of their forming “Jesus groups” in his lifetime. After the resurrection, however, his followers show an instinct to gather and hold together those whom they convince about Jesus; and their demanding an identifying sign like baptism is the first step in that process of gathering. Indeed, we have little evidence in early Christian missionary endeavor of people being free to say, “I now believe in Jesus,” and then walking off on their own. Rather they are made part of a community. They are justified and can be saved, but not simply as individuals. Today, as all know, there are doctrinal divisions among Christian churches. Yet there may be a more fundamental division, namely, between those who think “church” is important, and those for whom Christianity is really a matter of “Jesus and me,” without any concept of being saved as part of a people or church.

(5) In its first description of new believers in Jesus being baptized (2:38–41), Acts speaks of baptism “in the name of Jesus.” From the very beginning the identity of Jesus’ followers was established by what they believed and professed about Jesus. (Later creeds are an enlarged expression of the faith expressed at baptism.) This was a startling difference from Judaism; for although one could call Jews “disciples of Moses” (John 9:28), no one would ever think of defining them by what they believed about the personal identity of Moses. The need to give expression to the centrality of Jesus in the new covenant made Christianity a creedal religion in a manner dissimilar to Judaism. It would be a fascinating exercise some Sunday to ask everyone in church to write on a slip of paper one sentence explaining what a Christian is. Certainly many responses would consist of behavioral descriptions, e.g., a Christian is one who practices love of neighbor. Indeed, one cannot be much of a Christian without behaving as Jesus taught, but behavior is not sufficiently defining: Christians are not the only ones who exhibit love toward each other. How many responses would reflect the most ancient and basic definition that a Christian is one who believes that Jesus is the Christ?

(6) As with other aspects of Acts’ portrayal of the early church, the notion of *koinōnia* (“communion,” introduced in 2:42) needs emphasis in our time. It is scandalous that Christian churches have broken *koinōnia* with each other; and the purpose of ecumenism is to see if they can regain communion. After the 16th-century Reformation the Protestant churches seemed to splin-

ter over and over again; and although there has been some reunification within denominations, new divisions arise over sensitive issues. Roman Catholics prided themselves on being united; yet now after the 20th-century self-reformation at Vatican II, Catholics are splintering. Ultraconservatives are convinced that the church has moved too far away from “the good old days”; liberals are convinced that the church is not moving fast enough; and both are extremely critical of the pope for not siding with them. All Christians need to be reminded that breaking the *koinōnia* is scarcely reduplicating the values of the early church.

(7) The *General Analysis* above points out many Jewish features in the life and practice of the first Christians described at the beginning of Acts. A Jewish pattern may also have affected the Christian choice of a time for eating the eucharistic meal. The discovery of the empty tomb early Sunday morning helped to fix Christian attention on what by the end of the 1st century would be known as “the Lord’s Day.” Yet the choice of Sunday may have also been facilitated by the pattern of the Jewish Sabbath, which ended at sundown on Saturday. Before sundown Jews who believed in Jesus were restricted in movement (a Sabbath day’s journey); but when the Sabbath was over (Saturday evening), they would have been free to come from a distance to assemble in the house of another believer to break the eucharistic bread. This may explain the ancient Christian memory of a celebration on the night between Saturday and Sunday.

(8) The discussion of Acts 6: 1–6 above enables us to see the development of church structure as the product not only of sociological necessity but also of the guidance of the Spirit. For that reason, certain basic aspects of structure are believed by many Christians to be unchangeable. In other words, on the analogy of the incarnation, there can be both the human and the divine in the church and its structure. A recognition of that will allow certain adaptations in church structure to meet the needs of the day without giving the sense that each generation is free to reinvent the church. The difficult task is to decide which issues are changeable, and the Spirit working in the church and among Christians has to play a role in that decision.

(9) A major issue in Acts 10, 11, and 15 is the admission of Gentiles to Christian *koinōnia* without circumcision. This was not detectably an issue solved by Jesus in his lifetime since he showed little interest in Gentiles.<sup>112</sup> There are those today on both extremes of the ecclesiastical spectrum who think they can appeal to the words or deeds of Jesus to solve any question

<sup>112</sup>The stories of the Syrophenician woman who asked to have her daughter healed and of the Roman centurion whose faith Jesus praised are of exceptional character and do not really settle the problem.



in the church (parochial, regional, or universal). If Jesus did not solve the most fundamental question of the Christian mission, we may well doubt that his recorded words solve most subsequent debated problems in the church. How was the circumcision issue solved according to Acts? Peter does not act by his own initiative or wisdom; rather God shows him that he should not consider anyone unclean (Acts 10:28). Since Cornelius has received a vision from God, God shows no partiality (10:34). The uncircumcised Cornelius can be baptized because the Holy Spirit has come upon him (10:47). In other words we have the example of Christians facing an unforeseen problem and solving it, not by appeal to a previous blueprint by Jesus for the church,<sup>113</sup> but by insight (gained from the Holy Spirit) as to what Christ wanted for the church.

### Bibliography on Acts of the Apostles

(For all categories below, see also the *Bibliography* in Chapter 9 on Luke, especially the works marked there with an asterisk. For material on the presentation of Paul in Acts, see the *Bibliography* in Chapter 16 on Paul's life.)

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<sup>113</sup>Actually the most conservative group who maintained that circumcision of Gentiles was necessary may have appealed to Abraham and Moses as proof from the Scriptures requiring circumcision and argued that there was no evidence that Jesus had ever changed the requirement.

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